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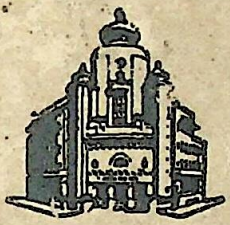

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

IN THE VISION OF GOD

PART II

Swami Ramdas

GENERAL EDITORS

K. M. MUNSHI

R. R. DIWAKAR

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY

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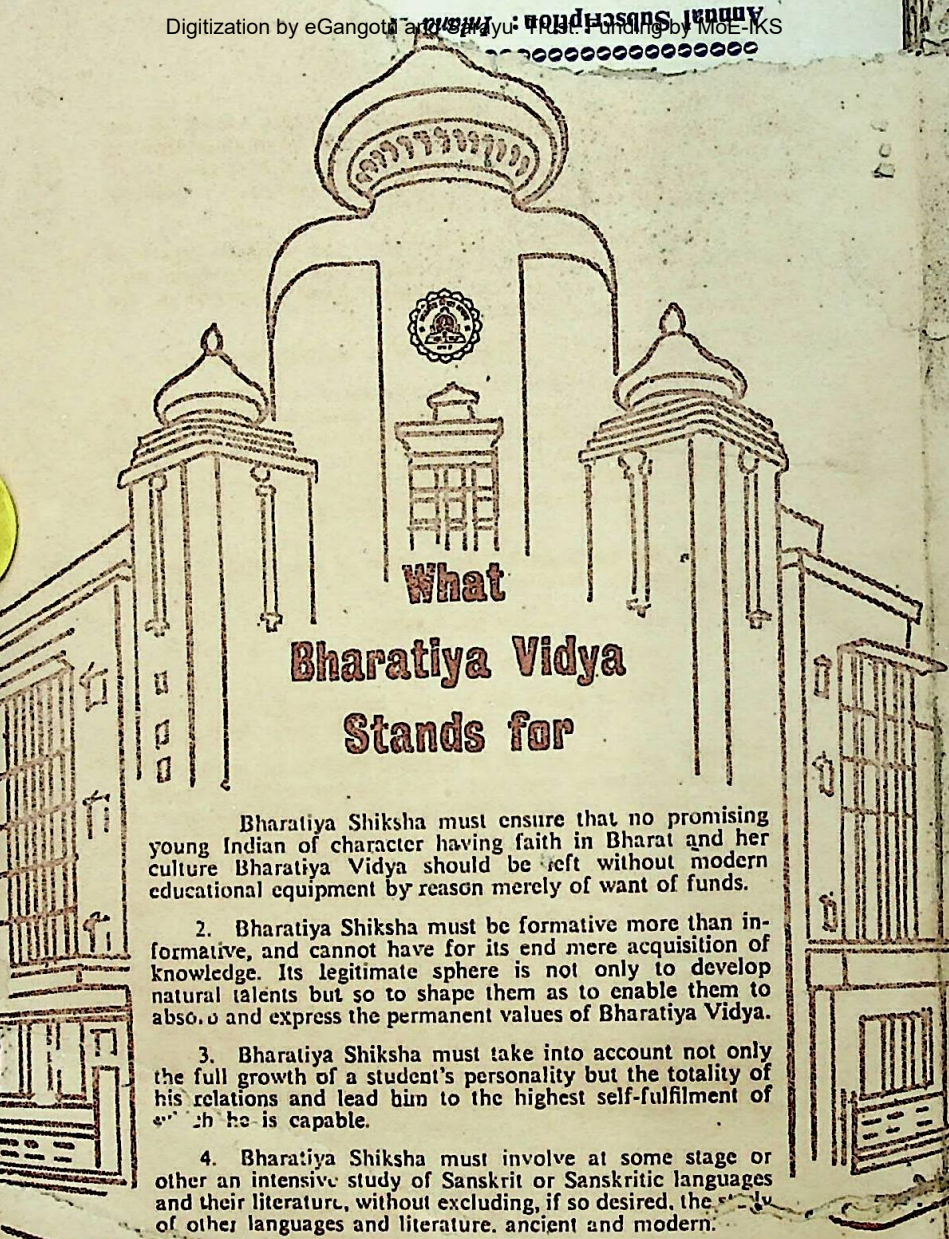

What Bharatiya Vidya Stands for

Bharatiya Shiksha must ensure that no promising young Indian of character having faith in Bharat and her culture Bharatiya Vidya should be left without modern educational equipment by reason merely of want of funds.

2. Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape them as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

3. Bharatiya Shiksha must take into account not only the full growth of a student's personality but the totality of his relations and lead him to the highest self-fulfilment of which he is capable.

4. Bharatiya Shiksha must involve at some stage or other an intensive study of Sanskrit or Sanskritic languages and their literature, without excluding, if so desired, the study of other languages and literature, ancient and modern.

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5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, iddas, forms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power of expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

(a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and

(b) the adoption by the student of the *Shishya* attitude by the development of—

(i) respect for the teacher,

(ii) a spirit of inquiry,

(iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with a kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form or attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world

Shri

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आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, 1-89-i

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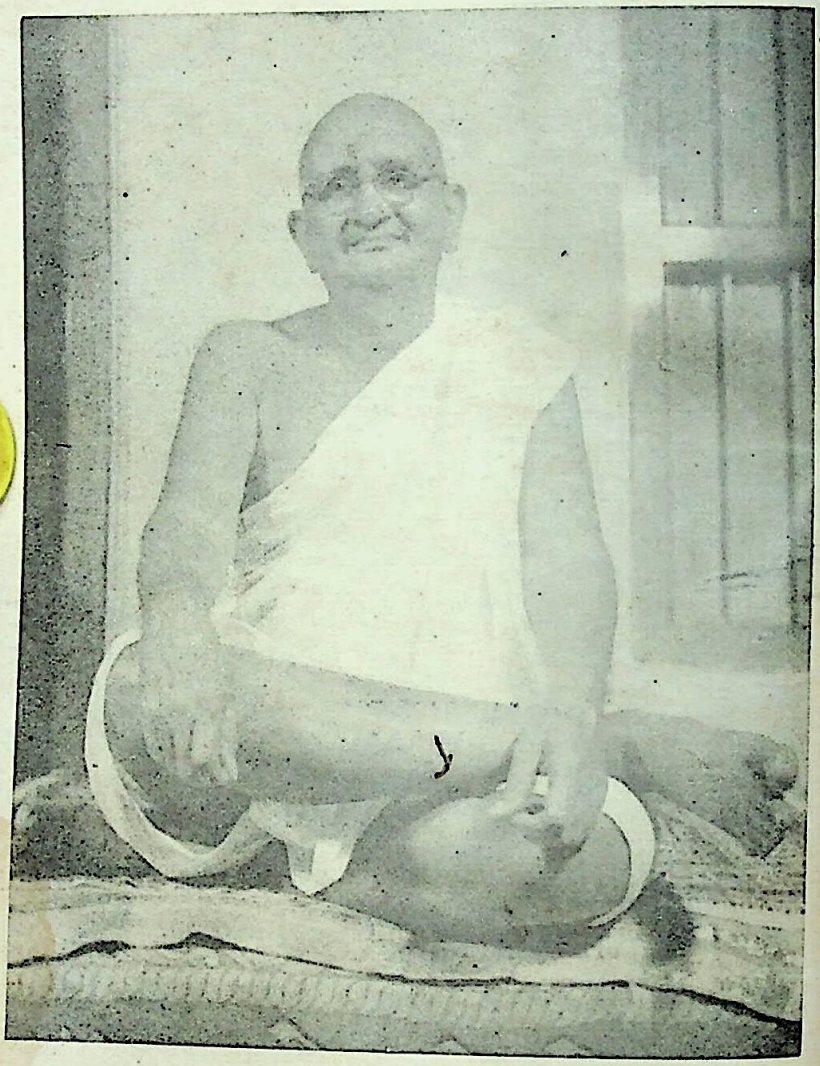

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First published in this Series—1963

Price Rs. 2.50, Sh. 4/6 or $ 1.15
Rupee Price (Outside India) Rs. 3.00

PRINTED IN INDIA

By Hargovandas Haribhai at Turf Printing Works, 31, Tribhuvan Road, Bombay 4, and published by S. Ramakrishnan, Executive Secretary, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 7.

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2.50.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of

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which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata,* summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata:* "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for

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its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI

K. M. MUNSHI

3rd October 1951.

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CHAPTER XXVII

KASARAGOD—SWARGASHRAM

(i) Ramdas beholds Rama and Sita

When Ramdas arrived at Kasaragod, he came to know that Ramabai's marriage was to be performed in a week's time. Anandrao, who was extremely kind to Ramdas in every way, had undertaken to have the celebration at his house. Ramdas stayed for the time being in the small room of his office. The preparations of the marriage went on. On the appointed day the house and the pandal were quite full of visitors. Ramdas was, all through the performance, an unconcerned witness of the wedding ceremony. He utilized his time in playing with the children. Once, when the bride and bridegroom were seated in the decorated mandapam, Ramdas was questioned as to who they were, and he made the ready reply:

"Ramdas beholds Rama and Sita in the pair."

The outstanding feature of the ceremony was the feeding of the poor at the close of it. Nearly three to four hundred people were provided with a sumptuous feast. Anandrao and his wife conducted the celebration. A few days later, Ramdas left Kasaragod for Mangalore where he spent a few days. Here again he met Mark Sanjivarao with whom he read some religious books at his rooms in Balmatta. Sanjivarao also introduced Ramdas to a Christian missionary couple. He took a great interest in presenting Ramdas to the Christian world.

Krishnarao, father of M. Bhavanishankerrao, who was then in Mangalore, came to Ramdas and proposed to escort him to Bangalore. They travelled by motor-bus via Mercara. One

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evening they found themselves in that hilly tract. There was a drizzle. Ramdas was made to sit in the motor-agent's tiny office. Where to spend the night? The question was sorely troubling Krishnarao, as he wished to find for Ramdas proper accommodation for the night. But God had provided against every contingency. When dusk was approaching, a man whom Ramdas had never seen before, coming to him fell at his feet and said:

"Swamiji, it will give me no small delight if you will be pleased to grace my house. I had been so keenly longing to have your darshan and God has granted me this blessed opportunity. Pray do come with me."

Ramdas agreeing, the friend took him to his storied house. His family members were away and he was alone with a servant. He made Ramdas sit on a deerskin asan and introduced himself as thus:

"Swamiji, my name is Madhav Kamath. I have read your book, 'In Quest of God' and have seen your picture in it. From the likeness you bear to the photograph I saw in the book, I could recognise you at once. Ever since I perused this book I was intensely desiring to see you. God heard my prayer and has sent you here for my sake."

As he spoke his throat grew husky with emotion and from his large eyes poured a stream of tears. He embraced Ramdas repeatedly in a state of ecstasy. He asked Ramdas to place his hand on his head which Ramdas did, and Madhav Kamath rolled on the floor in a trance-like condition. They went on talking till late in the night. He showered torrents of love and kindness on Ramdas. God in His own inscrutable ways looks after Ramdas with all tenderness and care.

Next day Ramdas started with Krishnarao. At Bangalore Ramdas was welcomed by Bhavanishankerrao, Sitabai and

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others of his household with great joy. Ramdas spent a few days here. Bhavanishankerrao, who was also eager to attend the Kumbhamela, accompanied him. In due time they reached Bombay and were received at the station by Sanjivarao who escorted him to his house. Sanjivarao and his wife were as overflowing with love as ever. Ramdas stayed with them for about three days and then, with Bhavanishankerrao, he journeyed towards Jhansi.

In Jhansi they resided in the same Ram mandir which he had occupied on previous occasions. All the old friends crowded into the mandir to see Ramdas. Ramkinkar found great happiness in serving the guests. Ramdas also met Ramcharandas who was awaiting his arrival in Jhansi.

The one prominent feature of his stay in Jhansi on this occasion was that he ate food from the same plate with friends drawn from different castes. Even brahmins joined them in the promiscuous dinner. Ramkinkar, a brahmin by caste, at first mildly resented the onslaught on the age-long custom, but in the end he yielded on account of his high esteem and love for Ramdas.

After a short stay in Jhansi, Ramdas with Bhavanishankerrao and Ramcharandas departed for Hardwar. Hardwar is at the foot of the Himalayas, a noted place of pilgrimage for Hindus. Here, once in twelve years, a mammoth gathering is held to commemorate the occasion of the devas drinking the nectar procured from the churning of the ocean. The festival is called "Kumbhamela."

The party stopped at Hardwar for an hour or thereabouts and then directed their steps upwards towards Rishikesh which lay at a distance of about fourteen miles from Hardwar. They travelled on foot. In the evening they reached the banks of the Ganges in Rishikesh. Crossing the river, where it was shallow,

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they came upon a vast sand bed which Ramdas selected as the most suitable place for their night halt. It was at the edge of a range of majestic heaven-kissing mountains. As night approached cold winds swept over the sand bed on which they had camped. There was a fallen tree close by. A fire was lit by setting fire to a dry branch of this tree.

The wind developed into a gale which blew furiously, carrying with it loose sand from the surface of the river bed. The situation became quite ticklish, and Ramdas laughed with unusual glee at the ineffectual efforts of the party to cover themselves with blankets against the sand-storm. The night passed without a wink of sleep. When the day dawned the devil of the storm was laid. The morning presented a calm and bewitching sight. The twilight spread its enchanting glow on the tall hills full of vegetation. Stillness and serenity reigned everywhere and the soft bracing breeze played on the scene which had assumed a menacing and troubled aspect the previous night.

At midday they ate meals procured from the annakshetras of the place, and towards evening they crossed the river and reached Swargashram. On the left bank of the river Ramdas observed a neat building going by the name of 'Ramashram.' The ashram was built in memory of the great and renowned Swami Rama Tirtha. Another time Ramdas had an opportunity to enter this ashram. A portion of it was then used as a Post office and the rooms inside were filled with book-cases containing a vast collection of religious literature in Sanskrit, English and other languages.

(ii) The boy gets his monkey up

Swargashram is an extensive garden at the base of the Nilkant hill, close to the banks of the Ganges which is running

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down at its front. In this garden, in three rows, are situated about two hundred kutis or tiny single and double room structures at twenty yards from one another. These are intended for the occupation of sadhus. There is also an annakshetra in the compound for supplying the sadhus with food twice a day.

The kutis were all full. There was no vacant kuti for their occupation. They at first settled themselves below a tree and decided upon spending the night there. But a kind Bengali sannyasi managed to procure for them a double kuti by a mutual arrangement with its then occupant. So they shifted to the kuti.

There were yet ten or twelve days for the Kumbhamela celebration at Hardwar. Sadhus and pilgrims had commenced to pour in, in large numbers, from all parts of India. Ramdas lived with the friends in the kuti for a couple of days. They obtained their food from the annakshetra. The food was shared by the three together from the same plate or leaf just as the Muhammadans do. One day Bhavanishankerrao and Ramdas finished their meal earlier than usual, and Ramcharandas was still busy munching the select bits of roties, quite in a leisurely fashion. A poor sweeper at the door of the kuti was anxiously waiting for the remains of the food, because the food the three got was more than they could eat. Seeing the eager and hungry look on the face of the sweeper, Ramdas said to Ramcharandas:

"Ram, that poor man must be very hungry; give him some roties. There will be anyhow a surplus left."

Ramcharandas went on eating without heeding Ramdas' words. Ramdas again repeated his suggestion. Still the boy gave no heed. For the third time Ramdas repeated his request. Now the boy was roused to anger. He looked at Ramdas for

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a few seconds with a steady glare, his eyes red with anger, and he growled:

"What! you would not allow me to eat in peace? What is the sense of your bothering me like this?"

At this outburst Ramdas could not resist exploding into laughter, whereas the boy unconcernedly went on cramming down roti after roti.

One day Ram willed that Ramdas should visit Vasishtashram. Ramdas proposed to go there alone. But Ramcharandas and Bhavanishankerrao insisted upon accompanying him. So the trio started together one early morning. The route to the ashram had been described to them by many sadhus, who were consulted on the subject, as extremely perilous, and none of them could tell where exactly it was. Crossing the river Ganges by boat—the suspension bridge having broken down during the floods—they came to the other side, i.e., the left bank of the river. Here they refreshed themselves with a cup of milk at the milk-vendor's. Ramcharandas carried with him a jholi or arm-bag containing some food-stuffs and vessels.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

HIMALAYAS—VASISHTASHRAM

(i) Upon the precipitous rock

Now, they set out on the journey, trusting solely to divine guidance. At first a shopman pointed out the direction they had to take. They passed through several fields and then waded past the thick growth of a jungle. As they emerged from it they came upon the bank of the Ganges. Here they met a cultivator who directed them to proceed along the river bank. At the same time, he also warned them that there was no beaten track to Vasishtashram and that, without a guide who knew the route, it would not be possible for them to reach the place. The distance to be covered was over twenty miles. God was their guide. They went forward.

The bank of the Ganges was strewn with big boulders, and they had to pass over these stones by jumping from one to another. They trod on thus for about three miles, when they came face to face with a sloping projection of a hill or headland at the edge of the river. So, here, further progress was cut off. They had then to climb the mountain to their left and pass through a labyrinth of trees, shrubs and creepers for about a mile. Then after a short descent they came again in sight of the river bank. While journeying over the mountain, they had to traverse through a tract called Brahmapuri which they did not notice at the time. On the banks they continued their journey again skipping from boulder to boulder. They went on like this for about two miles.

Here an accident happened which partly disabled Bhavani-shankerrao. The jumping feat sprained his ankle. So he began

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to slow down. Ramcharandas kept him company, whereas Ramdas was running in advance. Ramdas stopped at a spot where further progress was again cut off, as in the last instance. But the promontory this time was not a slope. It was an upright precipitous rock with slight ridges on the flat surface, facing the river. The mountain forming this rock was shooting straight up to a great height; so there was no means of climbing it sideways. The only path was to crawl along the brink of the rock, trusting hands and feet on the uneven furrows upon the vertical surface of the menacing cliff. Down below was rushing in high current the Ganges. A slight slip from the rock meant a fall into the foaming eddies of the river.

This was the situation that confronted him. After waiting for about half-an-hour, he was joined by the two friends. The condition of Bhavanishankerrao's foot was bad, and he was suffering from great pain. They discovered the danger and difficulty in the way of further progress. Ramcharandas suggested that the only alternative left was to return, and Bhavanishankerrao gave his silent vote in favour of the proposal. But Ramdas had to obey the will of Ram which was that he should brave the perilous path. He told the friends of this decision. Ramcharandas was against it and declared that it was sheer madness to venture upon an inaccessible path. Ramdas had no argument to offer. He only replied that the inner call of Ram was insistent and he must obey it, madness or no madness.

While Ramcharandas was still expostulating, three mountaineers, two men and one woman, were seen creeping along the same precipice towards them, coming from the opposite direction. After they had crossed over, Ramdas started up and was about to proceed towards the fascinating rock, when the mountaineers shouted:

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"Beware, don't attempt the feat because we could do it. We are hill-people trained to such climbing from our childhood. Your case is different. You run a grave risk. Be advised. Don't, for God's sake, be fool-hardy and throw away life."

"Swamiji," Ramcharandas spoke again, "what the man says is perfectly right; do please give up the idea."

Ramdas, feeling amused by this talk, coolly replied, "Well, Ram, did you not observe that the feat was successfully accomplished by a woman while God has made us men and we hesitate?"

At this pointed remark Ramcharandas flared up. His mettle was roused and the boy retorted: "You know, for myself I don't mind casting my lot with you, but what of Bhavanishankerrao? You are aware that as his foot is not all right he cannot make the venture."

Ramdas was adamant. He was urged on from within. He could not withstand the stern command. He rushed to the precipice. His nimble body mounted the rock. His fingers held on to the slits on the rock; his toes rested on the cracks, his breath suspended, he crept on and on—a tense ten minutes' job and he was on the other side, at the top. He could see the two friends sitting on the sands on the opposite side. He now wildly beckoned them to follow him. Ramcharandas suddenly disappeared from his view. He was making the attempt—ten minutes, and Ramcharandas was beside him. But Bhavanishankerrao was still where he was sitting. Surely he too would have come up had his foot been sound. Now Ramdas realised the situation. To leave Bhavanishankerrao alone, maimed as he was, and that too half-way in a strange place, was not proper. He was unused to such adventures.

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Now, turning to Ramcharandas, Ramdas said: "Ram, Bhavanishankerrao cannot be left behind alone with a sprained foot. You ought to return to him and escort him back to Swargashram. As for Ramdas, there is no retracing; he must proceed in search of Vasishtashram. It depends upon Ram if you will ever see him again. He is going to lose himself in the bewildering maze of the Himalayan hills and forests."

Ramcharandas had to retreat. He joined his companion on the other side and both together started back to Swargashram. Ramdas was now alone. It must always be understood that Ram ever kept him company. He ran on, dancing on the banks of the Ganges. He rounded a curve of the bank and rushed on for about half-a-mile only to meet again another headland. He looked aloft and discovered about fifty feet uphill a hollow—a wide gaping cavity in the hill. To cross the hill at the sharp edge of the river was out of the question. He now ascended the slope on all fours, and creeping up like a mouse came to the hollow. It was a shallow cave. On entering it he found that he could just stand erect in it. In the interior as its roof was a huge honeycomb. He found thousands of bees humming around their picturesque abode. The sweet music of their buzz filled the cave. He listened to it for a time in rapture. Emerging, he looked at the prospect. The giant rock to be traversed in front was very smooth and slippery. It extended over a hundred yards. What was to be done? Ramdas spoke:

"Ram, now it seems to be Thy will that Ramdas should not visit Vasishtashram, although it was by Thy will he started on this adventure. What does it matter to Ramdas if he should not? He will return by the way he came."

He felt no sense of disappointment. He climbed down to the bank of the Ganges, and turning back kept running close

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to the water-side. He had not gone fifty yards when he came upon a sight which arrested his further progress. A human skeleton was lying before him at the edge of the waters. From its size it appeared to be of a boy, still in his teens. It was a fresh skeleton and the natural gloss was still on the bones. Except for a few patches of skin and hair on its skull, the rest of it was clean stripped of all flesh.

Hitherto silent, Ram now addressed Ramdas:

"Ramdas, do you see the skeleton—a mere inert mass of bones? Your body too is made of the same stuff and a similar fate awaits it. The body is a transient, perishable thing. You have no reason whatever to be proud of it. The only purpose for which it is granted to you is to utilise it for My service, until it falls off and is reduced to the same condition as this worthless skeleton."

Ramdas took the lesson. Ram is the greatest teacher of the world. As occasions require He would assume any part He chooses. He is a consummate actor and a master of all arts.

(ii) You are in the Hands of God

Now Ramdas further retraced his steps and neared the precipitous rock where he had separated from the two friends. As he was making for it, a voice called him from the river-side. He halted and saw two mountaineers (certainly, it was Ram in those forms) filling their pitchers with water at the river. One of them came towards him and enquired whither he was going. Ramdas told him that he wanted to visit Vasishtashram, but since Ram had not shown him the way he was returning. Ram's ways are wonderful!

The man said: "Vasishtashram is still far away. There is no path by the bank of the river. You have to climb the tall mountain in front. Thereon you see a foot-path in the midst

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of the jungle. You must take it. On reaching the top, you should descend to the other side where you will observe from a distance the dome of a mandir. Taking it as your mark, you should proceed towards it, and you will reach Shivapuri, a small village in which the temple stands."

He pointed again to the foot-track; a thin streak of it could be seen on the high mountain. Ramdas at once ran on to it. Up and up he climbed. It was a steep ascent, but Ramdas did not stop even to take breath. The divine power in him had gifted him with marvellous agility and unusual endurance. An hour's walk brought him to the summit wherefrom he could observe the dome of the mandir referred to by the mountaineer. Here commenced the descent. It must be noted that the mountain was covered with a dense forest. On occasions he had to wriggle through the mazy growth of shrubs and trees. He ran down the incline at full speed. At the bottom he met again the welcome river. He drank to his fill its nectar-like water, and proceeded to Shivapuri which was now close by.

Ramdas found in the village, besides the temple, only about five or six huts of cultivators. One of the cultivators, seeing him, invited him to his hut. Ramdas entered and sat on a mat spread out for him. He beheld a bonny baby playing near a grinding stone. He got the baby at once on his lap and began to fondle and laugh with it. The cultivator and his wife were tenderly watching him as though a new child had come to them to play with theirs. Now he told them that he was on his way to Vasishtashram. Both of them gazed at him with wonder. He was not only alone but had nothing with him except his long coat of khaddar, a cheap sweater as underwear (which he handed to the cultivator friend before leaving the place) and a piece of blanket.

"Look here, sadhuji," the cultivator said, "it is getting dark

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(it was then about half-past-six, evening, when Ramdas reached the village); you may occupy the temple for the night. My wife will send you some khichadi. As for your trip to Vasishtashram I do not know what to tell you. There is no proper route to it, and without a guide you cannot dream of reaching it. I know people of your sort cannot be persuaded to give up the venture. So I would tell you this much. Go along the bank for about two miles and you will see on the opposite side of the river a projecting group of trees bending over the river. Mark this spot. Just facing this clump of trees, on your side of the hill, you will discover a footpath. Here, abandoning the river bank, take to the footpath and climb up the hill. Further, how shall I instruct you? You are in the hands of God and He will see to it."

With these words he accompanied Ramdas to the mandir where he left him. In due course the khichadi came. It tasted heavenly for it was full of prem—love.

The interior of the temple was about seven feet square. Its spire was high up in the air. The whole structure was built on a raised stone platform. The doors were open. The last streaks of light of the dying day entering the temple displayed to Ramdas' view a number of small brass images of God on a low, wide stool, standing against the back wall of the temple. On the wall, over the images on two pegs was also hanging a coarse red Kashmir shawl. As evening approached cold had set in. Ramdas spread the blanket he had brought with him on the floor, and removing the temple shawl covered himself with it and lay down. Indeed, the divine Mother of the universe is ever watchful to protect Her children. No sooner had Ramdas closed his eyes than he heard somebody stepping into the temple. Ramdas opened his eyes and sat up to find a man sitting before him. In the dim light the features were not

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visible.

"I am the pujari of this temple," he introduced himself. He scrutinised Ramdas closely, then touched and felt the shawl, and then looking at the pegs on the wall he exclaimed:

"So you have taken the shawl. It belongs to Thakurji,"—meaning God.

Ramdas then put him a simple question: "Can you show Ramdas where your Thakurji is?"

At once he cried out: "I beg your pardon, blind fool that I am. You are He, you are He. You have every right to use it, maharaj." Instantly, he was all kindness and love. He further said: "May I get you something to eat? I have food ready in my house. It will be no small joy for me to feed you. Pray, accept my humble fare."

"Ramji," Ramdas replied, "Ramdas has already had his meal. Thanks for your kindness. You are Ramji indeed." He then left Ramdas.

Ramdas, rising early next morning, left Shivapuri and proceeded on his journey along the river bank. The sign pointed out by the cultivator was missed. About three miles' tramp brought him to a spot where further journey was cut off. He attempted a cliff, but had to give it up, for it was too steep and had absolutely no supports. He stopped and spoke to Ram:

"Ram, you are playing a funny game with Ramdas. Do as you will. Ramdas returns. If he were asked why he did not reach Vasishtashram, he would plainly say that you fooled him and sent him back half-way." It was all Ram's will—Ram's play.

Once again, Ramdas retraced his steps and by about nine o'clock reached Shivapuri again. He had no prompting to go to the village and so continued his journey. He passed the river-bank by the village but had not gone a few yards, when

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he met two mountaineers, forms of Ram—all forms are His—coming towards him from the opposite direction with two empty kerosene tins tied to their backs. They were tall young men. They saluted him "Ram, Ram," and questioned him as to where he was going and what he was about. He explained to them his object of visiting Vasishtashram, how it was thwarted and of his final retreat to the plains.

Now one of them said: "Turn back again: we are going with you, our way also lies towards Vasishtashram. We can escort and guide you along."

Ram, what a fast and loose player you are! The friends were quick trampers accustomed to hill climbing. So they thought it would be as well to make Ramdas walk before them so that he might not lag behind. But the power of God was tingling in Ramdas' veins. He skipped, danced and ran. The friends followed as best as they could. Now began an ascent on the hills. Here again his speed was as fast as ever. He was running up like a squirrel. After covering some height he halted and looked back. The two friends were still about forty or fifty yards behind, tearing along in hot pursuit. They waved their hands and hallooed him to stop. They came up to him gasping for breath, and peering at him with a curious twinkle in their eyes said:

"You are not an ordinary fellow. You well-nigh knocked the wind out of us. No good to have you in front. Henceforth you shall follow us." At this, Ramdas could not resist laughing, in which they heartily joined. So he had to go behind them. The gallop was now reduced to a trot, and when close to their back he would jump like an India-rubber ball. The play of shakti in him was irresistible.

At about one o'clock in the afternoon, the party reached the summit of a high mountain where there was a long narrow

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hut, peopled by cultivators and their cattle. The sun was hot and so the friends proposed to have some rest at this place. In a small outer hut Ramdas was asked to sit on some hay which was spread on the floor. The friends went inside the large hut and prepared, from the provisions supplied by the hospitable dwellers of the hut, meals consisting of rice, vegetable curry and curds. When things were ready he was asked to join them, and he had a refreshing dinner. It was the fare of the gods of which he partook there, so simple, clean and delicious. Altogether, after an hour's rest, he continued the journey with the two friends again. Now the path was through brambles, heaps of dry leaves and a network of trees and creepers. It was a gradual descent and at about six o'clock the trio sighted the river-bank again. One of them said: "We are now very near to the Vasishta cave."

"Where? Where?" cried Ramdas in irrepressible glee. They came on the bank. "There," pointed the finger of the friend towards the yawning mouth of the cave at some distance. Now Ramdas could not resist; he rushed in the direction like wind, leaving the friends behind. At the entrance of the cave he found standing a tall thin sadhu, wearing only a kaupin. Ramdas had been told by the friends, who guided him, that the cave was occupied by a mahatma.

Directly he saw the sadhu, he ran towards him and prostrated at his feet. The sadhu did not seem to like this mode of salutation. He remonstrated by the gesture of his hands. He entered the cave and Ramdas followed him. It was a large and spacious cave about ten feet high and fifteen feet wide and twenty feet long. As Ramdas stepped in he observed at the left-hand corner a number of tins arranged in a line. The floor was covered at the front by two gunny bags and by a wide, white quilt at the further end which served as the sadhu's seat.

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In the centre of the cave there was a small fire-place or dhuni. At the mouth of the cave, on the right, there was a neatly stacked pile of firewood. Ramdas sat down on one of the gunny bags and the sadhu occupied his seat. By this time the friends who guided him also arrived. They remained for a few minutes and then taking leave departed. Ram after all brought His child to the ashram.

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CHAPTER XXIX

VASISHTASHRAM

(i) The cup of milk

Now the sadhu looked at Ramdas and asked: "What brought you here?"

"Ram has brought Ramdas here to see the cave and also for your darshan," replied Ramdas.

'Have you had any food during the day?" he enquired.

"Yes," said Ramdas, "the guides who escorted him hither have been kind enough to feed him on the way."

Now staring at Ramdas more closely, he asked:

"Is this all you have got about you? Do you possess any money?"

"No, Ramdas has no command from Ram to carry money with him," answered Ramdas.

"In that case, you have come here to starve," said the sadhu deliberately. "Now listen," he continued, "I shall tell you how matters stand with me. I am neither a sadhu nor a mahatma. I am a simple vaishya merchant. I occupy this cave for three or four months in the year. It is not possible to remain here during the rains when the river swells and her water inundates the cave. The rest of the year I spend in my native place, in the plains. There I engage myself in some trade and collect profits amounting to about two hundred rupees with which I come here. I am not beholden to anybody for anything. I spend my own money to meet my wants. For a month past I have been living merely upon milk diet. I take daily not more than three-quarter seer of milk which I procure from the villages on the mountains.

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"A man from the village brings me milk at noon every day and I pay him down cash for it. Do you understand? If you would have any food you ought to climb up the hills and get bhiksha from the villages. To go up and down for it will absorb most of the day, and at that rate it would not be worth your while to stay here. So I would advise you to leave this place as early as possible. What are your plans? How long do you intend staying here?" he questioned.

"Ramdas has no plans," he replied. "He does not know how long Ram wishes him to stop here. All depends upon Him. As regards food, Ramdas is averse to taking solid food at any place where he wants to devote all his time to God, in wakefulness and meditation. Since God has granted him the staying power, even on water for some days, he would prefer not to climb the hill in search of food."

The sadhu was roused by this reply. Intently gazing on Ramdas, he said derisively:

"Enough of your gab. I have known many sadhus of your type who speak glibly of water-fast, but could not observe it for a single day. None of your bragging to me." Ramdas could clearly see that Ram was at His old game again. "Well, you say," he went on, "you would not take solid food, that means you are for liquids, eh!"

"Quite so, water only or milk if Ram provides," quietly rejoined Ramdas.

The sadhu burst out: "Ah! there you are. Now the cat is out of the bag." Now bending himself towards Ramdas and pointing his long forefingers at him, with looks full of contempt and words tinged with sarcasm, he spoke: "Have you come here to share a part of my daily drink of milk and starve me to death—is that what you mean?"

Ram, what a consummate actor you are! As is the master

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so is the servant. Ramdas, who learnt all this art at your feet, can meet you on your own ground. The play was now assuming a beautiful turn.

Ramdas coolly replied: "Ramji, it is far from Ramdas' wish to have any share of your milk. If Ram, who is all love, provides, he would have milk, but if He chooses not to he will be content with mere water which can be had in plenty from mother Ganga."

"We shall see, we shall see," he interrupted. "Now for the night, which is fast approaching, I shall show you two caves, come out," and he arose and went out, "you may occupy any one of them."

He took Ramdas out into the open and pointed out two small caves, one to the left and the other to the right of the big cave in which he lived. Ramdas selected the one to the left. It was just sufficient for one to stay in and, moreover, the floor was covered with a layer of hay. When Ramdas got in he found the cold within was severe, as though all the cold from outside had found its hiding place within the cave at the approach of night.

"You may occupy it afterwards, come with me to my cave. There is still light. We can sit together for a while," he said, and Ramdas, accordingly, followed him to his cave.

From one of his tins the sadhu took out some lumps of sugar and dissolving them in a brass cup of water offered the syrup to Ramdas. Ramdas drank the sweetened water. Then he prepared a chilam of tobacco and ascertained if Ramdas smoked. Ramdas said that he had no objection to smoking when Ram supplied.

"You are a wonderful fellow," he exclaimed, "you are used to smoke, and still you don't carry any smoke with you!"

Ramdas explained that he was a slave only to Ram and

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not of any habit. Then he drew in a few puffs at the chilam. It was now getting quite dark. The sadhu had lit a small earthen lamp poised on a wooden stand. Ramdas now stood up and walked out of the cave to proceed to the small cave he had decided upon occupying, when the sadhu stopped him saying:

"Tonight you may stay with me. From tomorrow you can live in the other cave."

Ram was kind indeed! Ramdas had really a great desire to remain at least for a night in the big cave which is the famous Vasishta cave. He returned and took his seat again by the side of the sadhu. Thereafter there was no talk. He sat up for about two hours in silence and then, taking the sadhu's permission, laid himself down. All the night he was half awake. The sadhu also never slept. He reclined against a cushion and at short intervals he was busy smoking his hookah, and was also now and again throwing a lump of sugar into his mouth.

The night passed. At daybreak Ramdas rose and sat up, but he felt no inducement to move. After some time, the sadhu suddenly flared up and said in a harsh voice:

"Get out, what are you doing here? Go to your cave. I wish to go into samadhi."

Ramdas quietly slipped out and directly entered the small cave in which he remained unmoved for the whole day. At about eleven o'clock noon, two men passed by the cave carrying milk for the sadhu. Half-an-hour later, one of them came to him with a cup of milk. He said that the sadhu in the cave had requested Ramdas to accept it. Ramdas now played his part as artfully as Ram played His. He refused to have the milk and asked the man to take it back to the sadhu. Thereupon the sadhu came in person with the milk-cup and approaching Ramdas pressed him to drink.

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"Maharaj," Ramdas said, "excuse Ramdas. How can you expect him to receive a share of your milk which is just what you require for yourself for the day? You may remember how you warned him when you said: 'Have you come here to share my daily drink of milk and starve me to death?'"

At this straight talk he winced and lowered his eyes, but still he pressed again.

"I appeal to you," he cried. "I want you to take this milk. I have mixed ample Gangaji's water with it. For me there is a sufficient quantity left."

"It is clear, Ram wills that Ramdas should live upon water diet for some days, but since you are so insistent, in the present instance, Ramdas accepts your milk on condition that he should not be offered again, and even if you do, he would not have it by any means."

The sadhu excitedly said: "All right." Ramdas drank the milk.

(ii) The Vision of Christ

Till evening Ramdas stuck to the cave. When night was drawing near, he found the sadhu popping in his head at the mouth of the cave and shouting out:

"Would you like to come to me for a smoke?"

It was evident that he wished to have Ramdas' company. Ramdas accordingly followed him to his cave. He offered Ramdas some puffs of his hookah and a cupful of sugar-water. There was not much of talk. Before it became quite dark, Ramdas left him and returned to his cave. The cold in the cave at night was very intense. He covered himself with the piece of blanket and sat up. About two or three hours after midnight, he was prompted by Ram to go to the sadhu for a live cinder. There were dried pieces of timber lying about in

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front of the cave. He thought of making a fire. In fact, he could bear the cold. Yet, why this idea of a fire? Ram, you want some fun perhaps, else why do you egg him on to this? He crept out of the cave in the darkness, came to the other cave and entering it called out:

"Maharaj, will you kindly spare for Ramdas a bit of fire? He wants to light up a fire in his cave."

"Eh!" he snarled, "you can't endure the cold and you want fire. You are climbing down, my boy. Here, take it."

Ramdas got a live cinder and returned to his cave. While he was doing so, he heard the sadhu muttering something in his own peculiar mocking tone, and Ramdas could not help chuckling within himself: "Ram, you are a downright joker!" The fire was lit, and he burnt all the firewood he could scramble together in the dark.

Morning dawned. Ramdas walked out of the cave. The morning light presented to him a most bewitching scene. The river was flowing at a distance of about twenty yards from the cave. A number of huge rocks were scattered over the bank of the river. He got a perch upon one of these rocks to view the enchanting scene before him.

From between a chain of tall, heaven-kissing mountains the glistening waters of the Ganges were gushing down past the caves. The mountains were clothed with dense vegetation and it looked as if a multi-coloured carpet was spread over them. Orange-hued clouds were slowly moving in the sky, on a background of pure blue. Stillness, coolness and grey mist pervaded the whole atmosphere. Ramdas' soul thrilled with inexpressible delight. For a while, all account of time, place and circumstance was lost. No wonder, Vasishta selected this spot for his ashram. To breathe that air is meditation itself. Your entire being remains merged in the infinite existence of God's own being. You are simply intoxicated with eternal peace and joy.

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Except going up to the river twice or thrice a day for drinks, Ramdas spent all his time on the rock. As night was throwing her dark mantle on the scene, he returned to his cave. For the first night in the cave he had some sensation of cold, though he could endure it. During the subsequent nights he was entirely free from its effects. As usual, the second night also passed in a half-wakeful and blissful state. In the morning, again he was found on the rock. When the sun had risen high up in the heavens, he observed a hill-man standing before him.

He questioned: "Is it true that you are bent upon starving yourself to death?"

Ramdas had no reply to give. He only smiled. The man gave him some half-ripe berries. They were hard and yet, for the sake of the love with which they were offered, Ramdas put them into his mouth, chewed them a little and then threw them away. Now the sadhu from the other cave also came to the scene, and staring at Ramdas said:

"You have come here not for yoga but for atmaghata, downright fool that you are!"

At this fresh fling, Ramdas' risibility was again excited and he burst into a hearty laugh.

Then Ramdas addressed him:

"O Ram, having brought your child here you are making him fast, and, on the top of it all, you are calling him a fool. Well, do as you will."

Here Ramdas discovered the truth of the saying: "Man is God playing the fool." The sadhu was uncontrollable in his rage. He could not speak more. He turned round and went back to his cave. Another day passed. The sadhu was careful thereafter to avoid Ramdas. Days were spent on the rock, and nights in the cave. Thus passed three more days.

Now the memorable night. It was on the fifth day, may be after midnight; the nights were pitch-dark. Ramdas usually

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sat up the whole night in the cave. The cave was suddenly lit up by a strange light. Ramdas saw seated before him, on the floor about three or four feet from him, the figure of a man. His face was dazzling with a heavenly splendour. The features were fine, regular and beautiful. There was a short, black, glossy beard and moustache on the face. The lips were crimson red, revealing milk-white, lustrous teeth. Soft, shining, black curls flowed down his shoulders. He wore a long, dark, chocolate-coloured robe or gown with wide, loose sleeves. What fascinated Ramdas were his eyes. They were scintillating like twin stars. The rays they were emitting were filled with tenderness, love and compassion.

Ramdas gazed on them, charmed and delighted. It struck him: "This is Jesus Christ." There was another beside him, but Ramdas' eyes were not for him, although he was aware of his presence. He might be a disciple. Now Christ's lips moved. He was speaking. Ramdas listened, but could not make out what he said. The tongue sounded strange and unknown to him. For, perhaps, a minute he spoke; then the vision vanished, while the glow of light remained in the cave for some minutes more. Ramdas was completely immersed in ecstasy and only came to external consciousness after broad daylight.

(iii) Selfishness—root of all Ignorance

Ram now made him understand that his stay at that place was coming to a close. He had no thought of the definite hour for starting. Until three o'clock he remained, as usual, on the rock in the open air.

Ram within told him: "Five days' fast has weakened your body, and so you are not fit to travel back to Swargashram. Go to the Sadhu and request him to feed you with roti and dal; then start."

Ramdas directly went up to the sadhu in the cave. The

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sadhu showed surprise at the sight of him. With eyes dilated, he looked at him and shook his head questioningly. Ramdas observed a marked change in him. His face was pale, dry and careworn. His frequent ebullitions of anger must have worked havoc with him.

Ramdas: "Maharaj, Ram wills Ramdas should now take leave of this place, but since his limbs are weak, owing to the fast, he has come to beg of you to feed him with roti and dal, so that he may gain sufficient strength for his return journey."

For a while the sadhu was perfectly silent—then a smile beamed on his face. First, he mixed some sugar in water, and making Ramdas drink it asked him to follow him. He took Ramdas out and both walked to the foot of a mountain, a furlong away. There, at a small stream of water flowing down-hill, they found five sturdy mountaineers at work. They were turning wood on a lathe contrivance by water-power—a crude wooden wheel revolving on a long spindle, at the end of which was fixed a round log of wood. With sharp-edged tools they were working at the wood, turning out beautifully-shaped vessels. The sadhu approaching them said:

"Look here, here is a sadhu who has been fasting for five days; he wants food. I have no food-stuffs with me. Will one of you run up to your village on the hills and get me victuals for one meal? Here is money for the purchase of the things," and he produced some coins.

They glanced at Ramdas and, turning to the sadhu, said: "Out of the stock of wheat-flour, ghee and dal we have with us, we can spare for him a meal, but we will not accept any price for them."

The sadhu remonstrated: "That will not do. You shall accept the price of the things you give. I wish to feed him at my expense."

So he persuaded them to take the price. They returned

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to the cave with the articles. The sadhu was a quick and neat hand at cooking, and, in less than half-an-hour, he prepared four rotis smeared with ghee and a curry of green dal. When he was at this task, he chose to have a few words with Ramdas.

"Nice fellow you are! These five days you have been frying me as I am now frying these roties. Your fast has created a flutter in all the villages over the hills, wherefrom so many people brought milk and foodstuffs for you, while you were sitting on that rock oblivious of everything. I sent them all back, for I dared not go and tell you. You denied me even the pleasure of feeding you with milk."

Here Ramdas interrupted him: "What! Maharaj, why shirk it? You have brought it about by your own words."

At this he cried out impatiently: "You fling it at me again and again!"

Ramdas looked straight at him, and the sadhu cowered beneath the gaze. Then Ramdas said:

"Maharaj, please listen. Ramdas is an humble servant and an innocent child of God, and he came here by His will alone. It is again He who prompted him to fast during these days. Ramdas never expected you to feed him. From the very first you thought of driving Ramdas away. You tried to frighten him, but Ramdas could not be frightened. You spoke harshly to him, but Ramdas could not be scared. You denounced him, and yet Ramdas remained good-humoured and calm. This is on one side. On the other, you were extremely kind to him. You compelled him to drink milk on the first day. You granted him the happy privilege of staying for a night in your cave. You regaled him with sweet drinks and tobacco, and gave him fire even at dead of night. Your appearance shows, because of this fast, you have been feeling anxious about Ramdas. Ramdas knows that this is all Ram's play. Kindness and

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harshness are the same to him. He does not know what yoga or atmaghata means. He is a simple believer in the all-powerful Name of God. It is that Name that has brought Ramdas face to face with Him."

Here the sadhu broke in:

"That you do not know yoga, I cannot now believe. I admit I made a mistake. I ought to have known better by the colour of your cloth. I have a perfect dread of sannyasis. Fasting is no good for you any longer. It brings you down to tamoguna; otherwise you would not have talked as you have done."

Ramdas replied: "Ramdas does not know how any guna works in him. He does everything by Ram's will. Even now he is talking by His will alone. Ramdas has neither hatred nor love for anybody. Whereas he has been tutored by Ram that selfishness is the root of all ignorance in this world; it is the cause of all misery and pain. By surrendering to the Lord of the universe, the supreme Master of our being, we can eradicate the ego sense, get enlightenment and attain eternal peace and joy. This blessed cave is the abode of the rishis who realised the grand Truth. The atmosphere here is thrilling with the fervour of their tapasya. Living in it let us not forget the aim and goal of life, viz., the realisation of the Godhead within and without us."

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CHAPTER XXX

RETURN JOURNEY

(i) God is an Ocean of Compassion

By this time the roties and dal were ready. The sadhu procured some large leaves from the shrubs outside, and packing the food in them he called for the spare kaupin of Ramdas, and fastening the parcel with it, handed it to him saying:

"Go to the bank of the river, eat as much as you need and pack up the remaining food which will serve you on your way. After you have finished, I will escort you to the edge of the river where you will find a man with a raft. He will take you across. You can journey back by a new route, along the other side of the river."

Accordingly, Ramdas went to the riverside and sitting on a stone could not consume more than a quarter of a roti and a small quantity of dal with it. The rest he tied up again and prepared to start. The sadhu took him to the raft and instructed the raftman to row him across the river. Ramdas boarded the raft and the sadhu returned to his cave. The current in the river was very strong, but the raftman was equal to it. He rowed on. In mid-stream he asked Ramdas what he was carrying in the parcel. Ramdas told him that it was dal and roti. Then, with a bright smile he said:

"I am so hungry. I shall thank you if you will give the food to me."

Ramdas needed no asking twice and no thanks. With the greatest delight he passed on the parcel to him. Ramdas now understood that Ram wanted him to carry it for the sake of the raftman.

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Ramdas arrived at the other bank. As he proceeded on the sands a few steps, he found an old man chopping a fallen tree with a hatchet, for making a post. Ramdas went up to him and sat beside him.

"Ramji," Ramdas asked, "will you please show Ramdas the way that leads to Swargashram?"

The kindly old man stopped his work and looking up at him, said: "Swargashram is far, far away. There is no beaten track or cut-out path. You have to go from stage to stage, making enquiries on the way. Darkness is already at hand. So you cannot think of starting on your long journey now. You go by the path I am showing you. A mile uphill you will discover two houses, surrounded by cornfields. You take refuge in one of them. The people over there will gladly give you shelter for the night. Tomorrow morning you may start on your journey."

He pointed at a thin zigzag foot-path, going up the hills in the midst of a dense growth of trees. He climbed up and, on ascending about a mile, found himself on a vast area of green fields, the mountain rising still higher in the background. He noticed two small houses, about forty yards from each other, standing in the midst of the fields. He passed through the fields towards one of them. In front of the house there was a raised platform of wooden planks supported by stout stumps of trees. He got upon it. Beside two lads, a middle-aged man and an old man were squatting upon it. The latter two were busy mending a torn blanket. When they saw him the middle-aged man rose, and producing from the house a black rug, spread it on the floor and beckoned him to sit on it. He sat down. He asked where Ramdas was coming from and whither he was bound. Ramdas replied that he was hailing from Vasishtashram and was on his way to Swargashram.

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The middle-aged man: "You must have then met the sadhu who lives in the cave. He does not let any other sadhu stay at the place. He makes it a point to drive him away. He is harsh and cruel."

Ramdas said: "Externally he may appear to be harsh, but he has a soft heart. God's lila is wonderful! He plays in various ways. The sadhu fed Ramdas with dal and roti before leaving the ashram. In many ways he was kind and loving to him."

He replied: "This is strange. We have found him far from kind and courteous. However, by the way, for the night what shall we offer you?" After a pause of moodiness, he said: "Here I have a number of cows," pointing to a herd of cows resting in an open enclosure, facing his dwelling, "but I count it a misfortune that at the moment none of them is yielding milk, or I should be so happy to feed you with milk."

Again after a moment's thought, he called his son—one of the lads—and asked him to run to the neighbouring house with a pot for some milk, and spread two thick blankets on a coir cot, the only furniture in the house, and lighting up a fire in front of it, asked Ramdas to enter and occupy it. He made him lie down and began to massage his legs.

He addressed Ramdas, his heart welling up with love: "You are veritably Ishwara who has come to my humble abode. I am only a miserable samsari, lost in the whirlpool of maya. I have been crying to God to grant me peace and He has, in answer to my prayer, come to me in your form. God is indeed the very ocean of compassion and mercy."

Ramdas rejoined: "Hare Ram, this is all your lila. Ishwara is the friend of the helpless and servant of His devotees. Ramdas is only a child of God. Thou art He indeed who is deluging him with Thy unbounded love.".

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Ramdas cannot find words to express with what motherly kindness and care he tended Ramdas. His daughter aged about twelve prepared the food, his wife being no longer in the land of the mortals.

The interior of the hut was dimly lit by log fire. The host left Ramdas and returned with a wide-mouthed cup of hot milk and a soft roti which he minced and mixed with the milk. Meanwhile, he picked up some white things from a full basket close by and offered them to Ramdas.

"Eat them," he said.

Ramdas pressed them between his fingers and felt them soft. In the dim light he could scarcely make out what the pieces were. Ramdas put a piece into his mouth. It was so delicious to the taste.

The host: "It is kand, a root that you are eating. It is boiled. We obtain it in these parts in plenty."

Ramdas: "Ramji, Ramdas would prefer to eat two more pieces of this root and must be excused regarding roti and milk."

"No, No," he lovingly remonstrated, "you shall have both. You may do justice to as much kand as you like, but you ought to drink milk in which I have mixed up roti."

Ramdas had to drink milk thickened with roti as also eat some more bits of kand. Then all the inmates had their evening meal. Far into the night the happy talk of God, bhakti, prem and anand went on. The host was all the while in ecstasy.

After a couple of hours' sleep, Ramdas awoke in the morning and started on his journey. The host was inconsolable. With tears in his eyes he appealed to Ramdas to stay with him a day longer. But Ram's command to Ramdas to leave the place was imperative. He gave a parting embrace to the kind

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host when he said:

"You see higher up on the hills a small patch; it is a group of huts. Keeping the sign in view, walk up towards it. You might reach there at midday, and the hospitable people of the village will look to your wants."

Traversing through forests and valleys, Ramdas reached the village, when the sun had risen right overhead. Here too, the villagers treated him with the greatest hospitality. After meal he set out again.

The old man of the village said: "Maharaj, you have yet to cover a distance of about ten miles. There is no footpath, nor are there any villages on the way. If you venture alone, God only should be your guide. I can only show you the direction in which you have to go."

(ii) Ramdas' chat with Ram

The old man pointed out with his forefinger the direction, and Ramdas tramped on. After walking about a mile he found himself in a dense jungle, the ground being covered with dry leaves—almost knee-deep; he waded through them. He was in fact going on at random and he was in a conversational mood.

He addressed Ram: "Divine mother, it is yourself who has brought this child here to roam on these sacred hills. It is up to you to lead and guide him."

As he walked on, he came upon a sloping hill. Here he discovered, at the edge of a cliff, a cave—a deep hollow in a rock. He peeped into it. It was utterly dark inside. He had heard that such caves were usually lairs of wild beasts. He thought that he had now an opportunity of getting darshan of Ram in the form of a tiger or lion. He jumped into the cave and shouted out "Hari Om" three times and awaited the result. None came out of the cave. It was Ram's will that he should

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not come face to face with wild beasts. He came out.

There was yawning before him a deep precipice. This had to be climbed down.

"Now, Ram, what do you propose?" asked Ramdas.

"Fear not, child, descend," was Ram's cool reply.

Ramdas turned round and slowly lowered himself and began to crawl down. The chinks on the rough crag serving as foot-supports and hand-holds he descended. A slight slip meant a fall of over two hundred feet and certain destruction of the body. But there was Ram's assurance. Fear had taken leave of Ramdas once for all. Slowly and steadily, step by step, he got down. The body of Ramdas seemed to be like an inflated rubber doll, so light and so buoyant. Breathing had automatically stopped. The fragile foot-supports had at times been trembling, sending down bits of stone layers through the pressure of the foot, producing by their fall reverberating sounds at the depths of the valley below. What time it took him to reach the bottom of the ravine he had no idea. It all appeared to be so short. He at last alighted at the base of the rock, quite safe. Here again he cried out at a high pitch "Hari Om," making the giant hills all around resound with the echo.

Ramdas exclaimed: "Ram, how glorious you are! You have made Ramdas perform a most marvellous feat."

Ram rejoined: "This is not all, more feats are in store for you, get ahead."

Ramdas continued his journey in the cool shade of the titanic trees.

Ramdas: "O Ram, how blessed is Ramdas to be conscious of your company with him even in this lonely place!"

"My child," Ram assured Ramdas, "you shall in future be always aware of my presence with you, in you and everywhere about you. I grant you this knowledge based upon your

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perfect oneness with me. You and I are one."

Ramdas, hearing this, laughed through intense joy. Half-a-mile was traversed. Now he came to the brink of another precipice, steeper than the previous one, but with no footholds of any kind for climbing down. It was a smooth, flat rock, running vertically down. Looking at it he giggled and said:

"Ram, now you are caught. Ramdas should like to know how you are tackling the problem now."

"Soft, soft," instantly put in Ram. "No doubt you are clever but I am more clever than you can ever imagine. Look to your right. There the ground slopes down, though the incline is sharp and slippery, try that way."

Ramdas stepped towards it and dancing a caper or two, laughed and spoke:

"Ram, you are a brick, but it won't do; you see the slope is not only sharp but is covered by loose earth. To put the foot on it is to slip, and Ramdas will then be rolling down like a folded mattress until he reaches the bottom; you like it, eh?"

"Ramdas, your laugh and poses are too early," observed Ram, "you don't seem to make use of the eyes which I have given you. Look well. On the incline, you will discover stumps of dried grass at some distance from one another. These are the roots of thick reeds, and being dry they cannot be distinguished from the earth, but a close scrutiny will reveal them to you. They are strong enough to support your feet. Descend without any delay."

Ram was right. There were roots. Ramdas, accordingly, going on all fours crept down, having the dried stumps of grass as foot-rests, one after the other, until he reached nearly the end of the incline beyond which there was again a steep chasm, the incline being no longer continuous. The situation, in which he was now placed, was supremely perilous. He had arrived at

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about two yards from the extreme edge of the slope, and a yard down there was only a faint mark of a stump visible which could support no more than a toe. Having stopped here, Ramdas asked:

"Now, Ram, what next?"

Ram was ever ready with His cues. He piped in: "Behold, child, a twig peeping out of the depths just on the edge of the slope. It is about half-an-inch thick. Reach it by your feet, descending a yard down by the help of the small root of grass. After that you will know what to do next."

Ramdas followed Ram's instructions and had the twig clutched in between the big toe and the other toes of his left foot like a monkey. Certainly, here Ramdas remembered Hanuman, the great devotee of Sri Ramchandra. The body was felt by Ramdas as light as a feather. With one foot thus poised on the twig, he let go the other from the grass root. For a few seconds his whole body was balanced on one foot. Ramdas now shrank himself and doubling up held on to the twig with both his hands. All the time the slender twig was oscillating to and fro most ominously.

Here he looked down. The depth below was tremendous, but hurrah! Ram, you are a miracle-monger! The twig on which Ramdas was resting belonged to a tall tree, starting from the very base of the precipice. He descended slowly, and gradually came upon the stouter branches of the tree. Now the descent became easy, the tree was a veritable giant of the forest, a tree so tall that Ramdas had never seen the like of it before. He at last reached the bottom. Now Ram had his laugh at Ramdas' expense. Ramdas was silent. Every time he was beaten, and Ram would have the upper hand.

Again Ramdas lighted upon a cave into which he entered and shouted out a loud outcry of "Hari Om," but there was

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no response. Thenceforth he had to pass through many a declivity, but easily. He was now running at full speed, frisking and dancing on the rocks. At last he found himself again suddenly on the banks of the Ganges. Here he had to execute a small feat on the edge of a rock projecting into the river. On the sandbank he sped on until he reached Phulchutty. In Phulchutty there was a dharmashala managed by Punjabee sadhus. When Ramdas ran towards the building, a young sannyasi welcomed him with open arms. He actually took Ramdas in the folds of his arms and embraced him heartily as if he had met a long lost brother or child.

He took Ramdas inside the dharmashala, seated him on an asan, massaged his legs for some time, and fed him sumptuously with infinite love. Ram, it is all Thy doing, Thou eternal love, manifest everywhere.

From Phulchutty, the same evening, Ramdas walked up to Swargashram, now only at a distance of two miles, which he reached before dark.

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CHAPTER XXXI

SWARGASHRAM—HARDWAR

(i) Ramdas gives it up

When Ramdas returned to Swargashram, he directed his steps to the double kuti which he had occupied with the other two friends before leaving for Vasishtashram. But he found the room locked. For the night he sought refuge in a kuti which was in ruins. This kuti consisted of nothing but two walls and tin sheets covering the top. The night was cold and icy blasts were blowing into the dilapidated kuti. The night passed and the next day he still found the double kuti shut and locked.

In the same line as the fallen kuti, in which Ramdas stayed for a night, there was another occupied by an old sadhu from Maharashtra. He had known Ramdas on the last occasion. He informed Ramdas that Ramcharandas and Bhavanishankerrao had left Swargashram some days before, and Ramcharandas had locked up the double kuti. He expressed his keen desire to accommodate Ramdas in his kuti. Ramdas accepted his hospitality. The room he occupied was only ten feet by four feet. There was a slightly raised pad of earth along its width which was intended for seat and sleeping place for the single dweller. The kind sadhu insisted upon Ramdas' using the raised pad, and, as for himself, the sadhu slept and sat on the lower floor at Ramdas' feet. The sadhu was a short-statured man. He was given to smoking ganja. His sadhana consisted of reading twice a day the Avadhuta Gita in Sanskrit of Sri Dattatreya.

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For bhiksha both he and Ramdas would go to the annakshetra at midday. One meal a day always sufficed Ramdas; such also was the case with the sadhu.

On account of the Kumbhamela and also the approaching pilgrimage to Badrinath and Kedarnath, there was an unusual rush of pilgrims in advance of the set periods. They would wander in Swargashram for the darshan of sadhus residing in the kutis. They used to make presents to the sadhus of eatables, cloth and money. The pious pilgrims, before turning away from the kuti after the darshan, would throw into the room their presents. Mostly they would fling pice. Everyday the coins collected would amount to ten to twelve annas. The sadhu had a joli or pouch in which he stored the coins.

Armed with the money the sadhu would run to the small bazaar outside the ashram and procure milk, tea, sugar and eatables. He would thus prepare tea twice a day from the proceeds of the alms. Ramdas found that the sadhu's life became one continuous round of fetching tea materials and preparing tea from morn to eve. Even his daily readings of Avadhuta Gita had to be stopped in consequence.

As days passed, the coins commenced to pour in like a shower, sometimes silver coins also. Every day there was a surplus or balance of coins after expenditure. The joli was getting heavier day by day, and the sadhu became madly active like a cat with a burnt tail!

Ramdas now wanted to cry halt and had a frank talk on the subject of money with the sadhu.

"Sadhuji, God has provided us with a shelter in the kuti and is feeding us with one meal a day. He wills that we should devote all our time to His remembrance. Now what are we doing? Tea, eatables and meal have become the sole things of our lives. You know sadhus have nothing to do with money.

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The moment you have surplus money after your creature needs are met, you think of the ways how you should spend it. You run to the bazaar for things which you can do without and get into a whirlpool of deluding activity. So, in future, we shall not accept any coins from the visitors. We will pray to them not to offer any. Let us see how much we have already accumulated."

The sadhu at first rebelled against the suggestion, but at last yielded when Ramdas asked him to choose between him and the money. He lowered the bag from the peg on the wall and poured out its contents. The amount was about five rupees, mostly in copper coins. The sadhu was for the time being convinced of what Ramdas told him on the question of money.

"What shall we do with the money?—shall we give it to some other sadhu?" he asked.

"How can you hand over a thing to another sadhu when you have found it bad for yourself?" remarked Ramdas.

"Then, what is to be done?" he queried.

"The only way," said Ramdas "is to throw away the money and have done with it."

At this hint the sadhu opened his eyes wide at Ramdas in surprise.

"Come along, fetch the coins," saying thus Ramdas walked out. The sadhu blindly obeyed. Ramdas led him, both his hands full of coins, to a meshy, thorny bush which was perfectly inaccessible.

"Now, throw the coins into the bush," Ramdas advised.

At one fling the coins flew into the thick bush and disappeared from view. Now they returned to the kuti. This happened in the evening. Next day, as usual, the pigrims had again their indefatigable quest for sadhus and came in larger numbers than before. They were appealed to, both by Ramdas

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and the sadhu, not to make presents of money, but in spite of their pleading they threw coins on the floor of the room at its entrance, as was their wont. This time not only copper coins but also silver rupees rolled down. In the evening they found that the collection amounted to several rupees.

Ramdas gave it up—it was Ram's will—and kept quiet over the matter. The sadhu coolly, as if nothing had happened regarding the money matter, went about preparing tea and storing up provisions procured from the collections.

(ii) The Kumbhamela

The main day of the Kumbhamela approached. It was to be on the morrow. Ramdas asked the sadhu if he had any idea of attending the festival at Hardwar. The sadhu seemed to have a great desire to be present at Hardwar the next day for the great occasion. He requested Ramdas to go with him. Ramdas also wished to see the fun. That they had good fun at the fair will be clear from what follows.

They started in the afternoon. Another old sadhu who was a permanent resident of Swargashram also joined them. They made a halt for the night at Sat Narayan Chutty, seven miles from Swargashram. Next day, after bhiksha, they walked to Hardwar where they arrived at about five in the evening. Both the banks of the Ganges in Hardwar presented a seething mass of humanity. For miles all round every nook and corner was occupied by pilgrims and sadhus. It was a tremendous gathering. It was said that over thirteen lakhs of people had assembled there for the gathering.

The sadhus, however, wedged themselves between two groups of pilgrims on the opposite bank of the river. The muhurta or auspicious hour for bathing in the Brahma kund was four hours after midnight. The belief goes that those who bathe

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in the kund at this psychological hour will attain immortality. Ramdas did not appreciate or had he any belief in that cheap method of earning immortality! God had granted him that supreme blessing already by making him pass through the necessary struggle and sadhana. He was there to witness the magnificent mela of lakhs of people. The very sight of the vast crowds sent him into ecstasies.

Till twelve the mass of humanity was lying still on the banks of the river. Now commenced a movement like the huge waves rising in the ocean. Thousands of pilgrims made a rush towards the coveted Brahma kund. The two sadhus and Ramdas had to join the rabble. The sadhus, to prevent their being separated from each other, had their hands interlocked with one another's. The crowd had to move very slowly, sometimes they took more than five minutes to cover a yard of ground.

Hundreds of police were present to maintain order and prevent accidents. On and on they went. At certain stages the crowds halted for over half-an-hour. No further movement was possible on account of the march of a thick crowd from the opposite direction. Thousands of people at the back pressed on them. They were crushed and squeezed as a sugarcane in the juice-extracting machine. The sadhus bellowed forth. The old sadhu who had newly joined them was frightened out of his wits.

"I don't want bath in the kund or any such blessed thing," he cried out. "I would I were out of this insufferable condition with my bones and skin whole."

But there was no escape. They had bargained for the experience and they must go through it willy-nilly. The sadhu's one thought was freedom from the most uncomfortable situation in which he found himself, and he counted such freedom as nothing short of immortality itself!

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At last, they reached a square open place on a broad road, where a number of police, with the help of their long lathis used for fencing, had kept at bay two on-rushing crowds from opposite directions of the road. The sadhus crouched close to a sweetmeat shop on the road-side. A moment had not passed, when the lathi fence gave way in one direction, owing to the enormous pressure of the crowd, and what ensued was pandemonium. Cries, yells, stamping and cursing rent the air. The old sadhu, who was close to Ramdas, giving himself up for lost, gave out a piercing shriek.

Ramdas was leaning against the wall of the shop, and he found two men standing on his knees, two on his shoulders and one on his neck which bent down with the weight. All through this marvellous experience he was perfectly calm and collected. At that time, he remembers to have had his breathing entirely stopped, he sustained the heavy human bodies with ease. If he had fallen down he would have been trampled down to pulp, but God's protecting hand was ever on him. Ramdas now heard a piteous cry from the old sadhu. A stout mother had taken up a standing posture on his chest, and he was exhorting her:

"O mother, you are my dearest mother. Please do come down from my chest. I cannot bear your weight. O mother, a thousand dandawats at your precious feet, please do!"

"I cannot do so, sadhuji," replied the mother. "The moment I jump to the ground, I am done for; have patience for a while."

"Oh!" shouted the sadhu, "you are then bent upon killing me. Why did I come here at all? Cursed be the thought that guided me to the death-trap."

The tense situation lasted only for a few minutes. The police got the crowds well in hand again and the space was

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cleared. Ramdas was relieved of his burdens and so also the old sadhu. The sadhu drew a long breath of inexpressible relief as the stout lady abandoned her perch upon his breast.

Till the evening of the next day they were driven hither and thither by the rushing crowds and the police, and they could not disentangle themselves from the vast and intricate human riddle. Ramdas was reminded of the perplexing fortress of the Mahabharata war. However, after the sun had gone down, they found a way out and proceeded towards Rishikesh with as much speed as they could muster.

Over a hundred casualties had occurred during the night's stampede and the violent onsets of the crowds. In the night they stopped again at Sat Narayan Chutty and next day reached Swargashram. The fright and fatigue to which the old sadhu was subjected in the mela told upon him, and he was laid up with fever and nervous debility for over a week, while Ramdas and his companion sadhu were sound as bells, not any the worse for the trying experience they had passed through.

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CHAPTER XXXII

NILKANT HILL

(i) First Attempt

Ramdas continued to stay with the Maharashtra sadhu in his kuti. Two or three days later a sannyasi from Nepal joined them. He felt a great attraction for Ramdas. He was a cheerful old man, stout, hale and hearty. He gave accounts of his extensive travels over the Himalayas. When he talked about hill-climbing, Ramdas got the idea of scaling the Nilkant hill at the back of the ashram and expressed his wish to the sadhus.

"I tried once to go up the hill, swami," said the Nepali sadhu, "but as I could not find the way I had to give up the enterprise. Since you would be making a venture I shall be quite glad to go with you."

The other sadhu was also consulted and he too agreed to accompany them. Early morning, the following day, they started. They made enquiries from a sadhu in the ashram about the way that led up to the shrine of Nilkant, at the top of the hill. He described certain marks on the route. The party now passed through a dense jungle at the bottom of the hill. They walked up and up. They could not find out the continuation of the beaten track. Ramdas led the party. He climbed up through the thick growth of brambles and trees. The sadhus followed close at his heels.

"Swami, you are going on the path of the siddhas," cried out the Nepali sadhu, meaning through a trackless path.

When they covered a height of about a mile they came upon a water spring where the sadhus suggested a halt for rest.

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After refreshing themselves with a drink from the cool spring, the Nepali sadhu said:

"Swami, we have missed the way. No good going further up. Let us retrace our steps to the ashram."

"No maharaj, we should not give up the attempt so soon," contended Ramdas. "Let us climb higher up and find out what there is at the top of this side of the hill."

The Nepali sadhu demurred, while the other was silent. He never asserted himself in anything. He had cast his lot with Ramdas and he was willing to abide by his decision. The Nepali sadhu was prevailed upon to agree with Ramdas. So, again, they commenced their climb. All through, Ramdas cut almost a direct upward path. He had no patience with winding ways. The Nepali, who had a long stick which he used to good effect, was trudging behind, gasping for breath. On ascending about a mile they reached the bottom of a steep cliff, a solid, rugged and perpendicular rock over a hundred feet high. It became clear that if one could climb up the cliff, one would reach the summit of the hill.

The sadhus rested at the base of the cliff. The Nepali now with a breath of relief said:

"Swami, now at least we can return since further progress in this direction is impossible."

Ramdas wthout giving him any reply stood up and gave forth a shrill and long cry of 'Hari Om.' The jungle and the sides of the majestic hills resounded with the thrilling utterance, but in the rolling reverberations of the sounds was also heard distinctly a corresponding call of a human voice proceeding from the top of the hill.

"Now, there is somebody at the top; Ramdas will go up," he said.

"Madness!" replied the Nepali. "There is no way to mount

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up. How can you go?"

"Of course, by climbing the cliff," Ramdas observed.

"Swami, do you want to commit suicide? Be advised; don't make your life so cheap and throw it away."

Ramdas heeded not. He directly bounded towards the threatening rock. He began crawling up on all fours like an ape, making the sharp, frail, slaty edges of the rough cliff as hand and footholds. They would often crumble beneath his feet, but he never lost his balance. Ramnam was being automatically repeated. The body was felt as light as a dry leaf. Higher and higher he climbed with reckless haste. Down below, the sadhus were watching with frightened looks his progress on the cliff. In less than fifteen minutes he scrambled over the giant rock and reached the top. He came upon a vast tableland, green with fields and vegetation. He saw also a small hut at a short distance and a hill-woman attending on a few cows grazing on the pasture. When she saw Ramdas she threw up her hands and cried in terror:

"Go away, go away, don't come near me."

"Mother, which is the way to Nilkant?" Ramdas asked.

"It is far away from here. It is on the other corner of the hill," she replied in a trembling voice.

Ramdas turned in the direction pointed by her outstetched finger and faced a dense and dark forest. If Ramdas walked through this forest he could come by the shrine Nilkant at the other end of the hill. The long distance spoken of by the mother signified miles of forest. He was prepared for the task. He would get the opportunity to come face to face with wild beasts of the jungle. It presented to him a most tempting situation. He knew that it was a daring venture in which life and death had to be counted as light as straw. He had also heard that naked siddhas roamed over these hills. Ramdas

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would have their darshan and company. He looked down from where he was. The sadhus who appeared small in size from that height were awaiting Ramdas' return. At the top of his voice Ramdas shouted to them to climb up to where he was and also wildly beckoned them to do so.

"We can't do it," came the voice from the Nepali. "Come down yourself; don't lose time."

"Turn back, both of you," replied Ramdas. "He intends going to Nilkant."

"No, no, I will not return without you. For God's sake come down," and the old man—the Nepali—danced in excitement, moving his arms like a wind-mill and showing by such gestures the force and urgency of his call!

Now Ramdas was in a dilemma. A moment's thought and the Nepali conquered. Ramdas descended; slipped down by a dangerous slope by the side of the cliff. In ten minutes Ramdas was with them again. The old man embraced him through excess of joy, his eyes filled with tears. Now they rested for some time at the spring, where the Maharashtra sadhu prepared tea in the lota belonging to the Nepali, who carried in his joli some jaggery and a few tea leaves. The time was about four o'clock.

"Let us hurry down," suggested the Nepali with fearful concern, "you know, as the evening sets in, wild beasts saunter out of their lairs for quenching their thirst at the spring."

So the party walked on at a brisk pace. At several places, the Nepali pointed out the foot-prints of wild animals, the sight of which made them run faster. About six o'clock they came back to Swargashram. The Nepali was by now utterly exhausted. What with the fatigue of the hill climbing, fear and anxiety, and gnawings of hunger, the old man was quite spent out.

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On reaching the kuti they were told that there had been a bhandara, i.e., a special feast that afternoon at the annakshetra. Ramdas ran up to the kshetra and begged food for three sadhus. The sannyasi in charge kindly supplied the necessary quantity of food from preparations left over from the afternoon feast. Ramdas and the sadhus had a satisfactory meal. Thus ended the attempt to visit the Nilkant shrine.

(ii) Second attempt

A few days later Ramcharandas turned up. He was in Hardwar during the Kumbhamela, but Ramdas had missed him in the vast assemblage. He insisted upon Ramdas' shifting to the double kuti which had been reserved during his absence.

"Ram, you had no business to lock up the room," remarked Ramdas to him. "The room is the property of all sadhus. During your absence so many sadhus were in search of kutis. Your reservation of the kuti was against the principle of sadhuism."

Ramdas did not wish to give up the company of the Maharashtra sadhu who had afforded him shelter for so many days. The sadhu also pleaded with Ramdas not to part with him. So for a day or two Ramdas continued to stay with him in spite of the repeated pressure of Ramcharandas who even tried to take him to his kuti by force. At last, finding Ramcharandas greatly upset by his unwillingness to share his kuti, Ramdas shifted to his room. Here Ramdas met two sannyasi disciples of Swami Akhandanand of Chitrakut. Ramdas again thought of going up the Nilkant hill. The Nepali sannyasi had left the ashram soon after his return from the disappointing trip.

Now a party consisting of Ramdas, Ramcharandas, the Maharashtra sadhu and the two sannyasis started on the

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adventure. But one of the sannyasis knew the route that led up to the Nilkant shrine as he had an occasion to visit the place before.

At this time Ramdas had come into contact with a sincere sadhaka from Nagpur, Ramchandra Timande, and the manager of a Marwadi annakshetra who were both very kind and loving to him. Ramchandra had begun to look upon him as his spiritual guide.

Before setting out on the Nilkant journey Ramcharandas had replenished his joli with food-stuffs from the Marwadi annakshetra. He possessed already two aluminium vessels and procured from the kshetra a hand hatchet for cutting firewood.

Early one morning the party commenced the ascent of the hill. The sannyasi guide took them along the proper path which, being spiral, was easy to climb. They had to cover a distance of seven miles which they did by midday. Now they came to a small stream of water which they crossed by the help of a wooden bridge and reached a place shaded by the spreading branches of a cluster of giant forest trees, in the middle of which stood the small mandir of Nilkant and two dharmashalas. The party alighted at one of the dharmashalas.

Here a dinner was prepared for all, and by two o'clock they finished their meals. Ramdas and Ramcharandas proposed to spend some days on the hill. The sannyasis and the Maharashtra sadhu left the hill top for the plains.

Ramdas was now for discovering the edible roots on the hill. So he and Ramcharandas began to dig for them at several places on the hill. It being summer the ground was hard and the hill-folk advised them not to try for the roots as they were deep down in the earth and it was not the season to dig for them. So they gave up the arduous task.

Ramdas then suggested to Ramcharandas that they should

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give up the dharmashala and seek a solitary nook on the hill for spending their days. The evening was drawing near. They started inspecting the hill for a secluded and suitable spot. The sun set. They were near a tiny stream in the small valley of a sloping hill. Ramdas climbed up the slope which was covered with a thick growth of short trees. In the midst of a group of trees Ramdas sat down.

"We shall remain here to-night and, after clearing the ground, we shall have between us a small pit in which we shall make a fire to keep us warm in the night," said Ramdas.

Then they set about collecting the dry twigs and branches of trees. Soon a fire was lit; the ground was cleared of the small shrubs and thorny plants. A lota of water was procured from the spring for drinking purposes. The night was cold but the fire kept them warm. Ramdas acquainted Ramcharandas with what they should do on the morrow.

"Ram, tomorrow let us cut down some trees with the help of the hatchet and erect a small hut to accommodate us and spend some quiet days here."

Ramcharandas agreed. The night was passed almost in a wakeful condition. From early morning next day, they grew busy in the erection of the proposed hut. Ramdas did the digging of the ground to make it level, and Ramcharandas went about to cut down the short trees for obtaining suitable posts for the shed. They toiled till midday. Ramcharandas prepared, at the small stream, a few roties and dal with which they satisfied their hunger and again applied themselves to the work in hand. They made marvellous progress in the construction of the needed hut. About three o'clock a shepherd of the hills came in that direction with his herd of sheep. Seeing these sadhus he approached and questioned them as to what they were doing. Ramdas made him understand the object of

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their labour.

"Maharaj," he said, "why all this unnecessary toil? There is a cave close by, most suitable for your occupation. Some time ago a sadhu was living in it. It is now vacant; you can reside in it instead of taking all this trouble. It is on the edge of a stream of pure crystal water."

Ramdas jumped at the idea and asked him: "Can you lead us to the cave?"

"Come along," he said, "I can take you to it instantly."

Turning to Ramcharandas Ramdas said: "Throw up this work; let us follow him."

Ramcharandas looked amazed at the whimsical command of Ramdas, but submitted, as he had done many a time before.

(iii) In the cave

The mountaineer escorted the sadhus to a cave about a hundred yards from the shrine of Nilkant, on the edge of a stream that supplied water to the shrine. The place was out of the way. The cave had a wide yawning mouth at its front and, as you entered it, it narrowed until you came to a small inner cavity just sufficient for one person to sit in. They swept the floor and set up a fire. There were signs of ashes indicating its previous occupation by some sadhu. The sweet music of the running stream close by and the distant roars of wild beasts were heard in the nights. The cave presented a prospect at once weird and awe-inspiring, and Ramdas liked the place very much.

The victuals that Ramcharandas possessed lasted them for about five days. Meanwhile, news spread among sadhus and pilgrims in Rishikesh and Swargashram that two sadhus were living on this hill in a cave, situated in a dreadful place. Hundreds of people commenced to come for the darshan of the

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sadhus. They brought various presents, such as milk, grapes, sugarcandy, fried gram, almonds, etc. It was clear that God was busy in seeing that they did not feel the want of the necessities of life!

One day, Ramcharandas asked:

"Swamiji, how long are we to stay here?"

"Ramdas has no idea," replied Ramdas. "It may be for months. The place has captured Ramdas' heart."

When there were no visitors they started collecting firewood. Stout, green branches were cut down and put up in the sun for drying. Ramdas was hewing down a thick stump of a dried-up tree. The axe was a small one and he had to work at it for three days, spending on it a couple of hours in the morning and evening. At last it was cut down, but the heavy log had yet to be carried to the mouth of the cave, and this task was reserved for a later occasion.

Daily the number of visitors increased. One evening a strong and well-built sadhu paid them a visit. He had bangles on his wrists, rings on his fingers and a joli suspended on his shoulder, containing a number of things. He presented Ramdas with a big lump of charas or extract of ganja for smoking. Ramdas accepted the gift. The sadhu was a ganja smoker himself. After some time he left the cave. On his departure Ramdas threw the lump of charas into the fire and burnt it to ashes. Next day the sadhu turned up again. He was short of charas. He expected Ramdas to provide him with some from the lump given by him the previous evening.

"May I have some charas?" he asked.

"Ramdas destroyed in the fire the lump of charas you presented him with," replied Ramdas.

"Well done, maharaj," he said with a sigh of relief. "I have become a slave to this vice and by your contact I hope to be

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freed from it." Thereafter, taking a great liking for Ramdas, he became a constant visitor.

Now the usual provisions for cooking dal and roti were nearly exhausted, although the gifts of other eatables were raining down every day. Ramcharandas was for the daily dal and roti.

"Swamiji," he said one night, "the provisions have run out. I intend going down to Marwadi kshetra in Swargashram and bringing provisions to last us for at least a fortnight. We require also earthen pots for fetching and storing water. I shall also obtain these."

"Ram," Ramdas observed, "why all this trouble? God provides us here. Let us be satisfied with the things He sends us."

"No, Swamiji, a meal of dal and roti, once a day, is essential. It is no trouble to me. I can manage to get the articles without difficulty. I have resolved upon it. I will start tomorrow morning and try to return by the evening," he said.

He was obstinate and Ramdas submitted. Early next morning, he climbed down the hill and made his way to Swargashram. That evening he was detained at the ashram. Ramdas enjoyed the perfect solitude of the cave in the night. Next day, at dusk, Ramcharandas tottered into the cave with a heavy burden on his head. He was carrying an enormous gunny bag bulging out with its contents and had also two big earthen pots hanging at his back.

He lowered the sack and released the pots and rolled on the floor of the cave through utter exhaustion. For full ten minutes he was unable to speak. He was just panting for breath. Then he slowly opened the bag and took out bundle after bundle of rice, dal, wheat-flour, potatoes, jaggery, ghee, sugar and what not. The provisions would have sufficed for over a

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month.

"What a wonderful fellow you are! Why so much?" Ramdas asked.

"So much? why, we need it all," he exclaimed. "It saves my going down frequently; for a month at least we can remain here quietly without any anxiety about food."

"Ram, you seem to trust more in these food-stuffs than in God!" Ramdas remarked.

Ramcharandas was not inclined to talk. The inner cavity in the cave was at once converted into a store-room and the bundles were nicely arranged inside it and Ramdas helped him in the work.

On the succeeding day, the fuel not being quite dry, Ramcharandas experienced great difficulty in cooking. Moreover, as the cooking had to be done in the open air, the strong breezes prevented the fire burning steadily. So that day's roties were under-baked and the dal half-boiled. Ramdas was lacking in teeth. Somehow he managed to swallow down the raw food. Even the meals prepared on the previous days had not been well-cooked as they had told upon Ramdas' digestion. Ramcharandas was still a sadhaka in this line as well! The cumulative effect of the indifferently cooked food affected Ramdas and he got a severe attack of dysentery which continued for over a fortnight.

Two days later, Ramdas had a visit from half-a-dozen sadhus. One of them, in the course of talk, suggested:

"Maharaj, why are you cooping yourself up here in this solitary place? You ought to travel in the Punjab and Kashmir and enjoy the prem of the devotees of those parts, especially in the Punjab where the people are so filled with devotion and love. You should not fail to visit that province."

Ramdas was at once impressed by his advice and believed

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that the hint came from God Himself for making a move from the cave. When the visitors departed Ramdas turned to Ramcharandas and said:

"Ram, it is the command of God that we should depart from here and travel towards the Punjab and Kashmir. Make yourself ready for starting."

The boy, hearing Ramdas' words, turned pale and then blue! He fondly glanced at the store-room.

"It is all very well," said Ramcharandas with a slow voice and a wry face. "Thank God, we are saved the terrible labour, that is, of rolling up the heavy stump of the tree from the ditch, into which it has fallen, to the mouth of the cave."

At this Ramdas could not control a laugh and the boy could not help joining him.

The stored provisions and the pots were then distributed among the hill-men and women, and by evening they found themselves in the small thatched kuti near the Marwadi annakshetra of Swargashram. The sadhu who had been addicted to charas, but who was now free from its clutches stuck on to Ramdas. He accompanied Ramdas down the hill and remained with him. He insisted upon following Ramdas wherever he went. Ramdas dissuaded him saying that he would find it very difficult to keep pace with Ramdas while walking. The weak point about the sadhu was that he could not walk fast on account of his bulky body. Moreover, Ramdas assured him that by keeping company with Ramdas he would not gain much, since the Truth he was in search of was within himself. Eventually, he was prevailed upon to abandon the idea of hanging on to him.

Ramchandra Timande and Brijlal Munim of Marwadi kshetra were overflowing in their kindness and hospitality. Ramdas proposed to travel on foot to Kashmir over the

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mountains. He was told that there was a path across the mountains that would lead to Kashmir; only that it was a tedious and perilous one. The undaunted spirit within Ramdas egged him on to undertake the difficult journey. Ramchandra Timande strongly opposed the idea and insisted upon Ramdas' travelling by train first to the Punjab and then to Kashmir.

"Swamiji, there are two famous places worth visiting in the Punjab—Chintapurni and Jwalajee. I will see that you are both provided with tickets as far as Hoshiarpur station, wherefrom you have to travel on foot to these noted shrines."

The kind-hearted friend succeeded in persuading Ramdas to leave Rishikesh with Ramcharandas by a train running towards the Punjab.

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CHAPTER XXXIII

CHINTAPURNI—JWALAJEE—PATHANKOT

(i) Pain transmuted into joy

In the evening they reached the station of Hoshiarpur, where they spent the night on the terrace of the huge rest-house for pilgrims. Here some pilgrims provided them with a drink of undiluted, warm milk, and cots to sleep on. Dysentery continued to harass Ramdas' body. Early next morning they prosecuted their journey on foot to Chintapurni, which lay about forty-five miles from Hoshiarpur. They had to walk up a gradually rising tract of land. They covered fifteen miles during the day and found rest in a small, village rest-house. Except stopping four or five times to answer calls of nature, Ramdas and Ramcharandas walked the distance at a rapid pace.

Ramdas eschewed solid food. He had a cup of milk while Ramcharandas procured by bhiksha some dal and roties for himself. At daybreak, next day, they started again. About eight o'clock they reached a wayside hamlet. As they neared a sweetmeat shop, the eatables exhibited in the shop drew the attention of Ramcharandas. Poor boy! his mouth must have watered at the sight of the tempting sweets! There was by the side of the shop a small thatched shed for the use of customers. Ramcharandas entered it followed by Ramdas. They sat on the floor. There was none else in the shed. Ramdas thought that Ramcharandas proposed to have some rest after the three hours' walk. God's ways are wonderful! A few minutes after they entered the shed, two Punjabis came in and sat near them.

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One of them saluting Ramdas enquired, "May I get for you some milk from the adjoining shop?" Ramdas gave an affirmative nod. The Punjabi then got for them two huge brass cupfuls of milk. Each cup contained about a seer of the liquid. Ramcharandas and Ramdas drank it.

Then the Punjabi asked Ramdas: "Maharaj, where are you going?"

"To Chintapurni," was Ramdas' simple reply.

"We are also on our way to the same place and I should consider it a great privilege to go in your company," he pleaded.

So the four forming a party continued their journey. Ramdas now walked at an incredibly quick pace. He suggested that they should reach Chintapurni that very night. Although he had had half-a-dozen motions due to dysentery on the way and in spite of the undulating ground, a rapid pace was maintained. They had to cover a distance of twenty-seven miles. About nine o'clock in the night they arrived at Chintapurni. They spent the night outside a stable.

Chintapurni is a small town with a temple of a Devi after whom it was named. The belief goes that a visit to this shrine dispels entirely one's sorrows and anxieties. Hence the name of the goddess. Next day the party after bath paid a visit to the temple. The Punjabi friend, whose name was Pandit Jewandas, persuaded Ramdas to take rest for a day in the hamlet. He felt great concern about Ramdas' health on learning of the attack of dysentery.

Refreshed by a day's rest the party started again. They were bound for Jwalajee which lay about twenty-five miles from Chintapurni. Again they commenced their journey at a brisk pace. At midday, they had a halt for about two hours beneath the trees on the way. By now dysentery had stopped, but, as they neared Jwalajee, Ramdas felt something wrong with his

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right foot. However, by evening they reached Jwalajee, where they spent the night in the ashram of Dashanami sannyasis, an ashram very near to the temple of Jwalajee. Here they were provided with meals and treated with great kindness and hospitality.

Next day Ramdas, wishing to find out a separate dwelling place, searched the hill for a cave and discovered a few yards above the ashram, a solid structure containing a number of vacant rooms in a line. Ramdas proposed to occupy one of these. Ramcharandas and Jewandas also became his room mates—the other friend, who accompanied Jewandas, having separated from the party on the way, as he was a college student returning to the parents who lived somewhere in the district.

Ramdas now detected a slight swelling on the sole of his right foot. However, they wished to finish the darshan of Jwalajee for which purpose they had come.

The temple is made of a square block, cut out of a solid mass of rock. The roofing is of plated gold having a beautiful dome with artistic designs carved on it. The dome shone with great lustre in the bright sun. It is said that the gold roof was presented by the great soldier and king, Ranjit Singh of historic fame. As Ramdas entered the temple he observed that its inside was conspicuous by the absence of any image. Within a few steps of the doorway was a small oblong pit, in which was seen a big tongue of flame waving and hissing and there were also similar smaller flames issuing out of the rock walls at other places, all round the interior of the temple. There were altogether about seven such volcanic flames. By Jwalajee is meant "Flame goddess." The worship and darshan were of the flames.

Coming out of the temple Ramdas ascended a flight of steps to the right of the temple and came to a small shed, where

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he saw a circular hole bored in a rock, to the depth of about two feet, in which water was set boiling by the heat of a flame below.

Later, Ramdas heard from Jewandas that the flames in the gold-roofed temple accepted the offering of milk by licking off nearly half the quantity of the milk presented to them, leaving the rest as prasad to the devotee. He gave out this as his own experience.

The darshan over, Ramdas and the party returned to their room. The succeeding day, the swelling on the foot of Ramdas increased. It took the shape of a boil. In three days it assumed the size of a large lemon. Jewandas and Ramcharandas busied themselves applying various ointments to it so that it might ripen and burst.

All the time Ramdas, in spite of the boil, was smiling and cheerful. Sadhus in great numbers came to see Ramdas in that condition. The thing that surprised them most was Ramdas' smiling face, although the condition of the foot could not permit of such a merry demeanour. Ramdas hardly slept in the nights. He sat up the whole night leaning against the wall. He was experiencing unbroken ecstasy. In such a mood he would go on talking about devotion and divine vision. Jewandas, who was eager to collect Ramdas' sayings, would jot down on scraps of paper, as quickly as he could write, every bit that fell from Ramdas' lips. He used a country oil lamp made of an earthen dish. The notes covered several sheets of paper.

Seven days passed. The boil showed no signs of bursting. One early morning, a sannyasini, i.e., a female sannyasi paid a visit to Ramdas. She saw the boil. Her heart was touched.

"Maharaj," she said, "the boil seems to be quite ripe now, it requires only opening up. I shall run down and send a barber who will open it and give relief to your foot."

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So saying, the kind-hearted mother went down the hill. About half-an-hour later, a barber, who was also the village surgeon, turned up. Ramdas stretched out his affected leg towards him, and with a blunt instrument the barber began to operate upon the boil. The skin of the sole being naturally thick the instrument had to be used with some force. However, he made an incision, and thrusting the point of the instrument inside the boil, he pulled it out tearing up the skin. Then he squeezed out the pus. A strip of cloth was wrapped round the wound.

"Maharaj, don't do any walking for some days. If dust is allowed to enter the wound you will get into further trouble," the barber warned.

Jewandas left Jwalajee the next day for his native place, Rawalpindi, and Ramdas also started. Some sadhus including Ramcharandas tried to dissuade Ramdas from travelling on foot just then, when the wound was still raw and unhealed. But Ramdas did not take their advice and came out on the road.

(ii) Ramcharandas fails the test

Ramdas limped as he walked. By midday they covered about ten miles and reached a small wayside hamlet. Ramcharandas undertook to fetch bhiksha of cooked food from the villagers. About one o'clock he returned, his cloth-sling filled with all kinds of food mixed up together. After dinner and rest they proceeded on their journey. In the evening they came to another village, where they remained for the night on a neighbouring hill top.

The following day they passed through the fertile and enchanting Kangra valley and reached at dusk a small town on an elevated plateau. Ramdas proposed that they might occupy a dilapidated rest-house for the night. But the boy was in no

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mood for rest, he was feeling hungry and the thought of food was revolving in his mind.

"Swamiji," he said, "I shall try to get some food by bhiksha. You may wait here beneath the tree."

The tree was in front of the rest-house. Ramcharandas passed into the darkness, but returned in a short time bare-handed and with a wry face.

"What is the matter, Ram?" Ramdas questioned.

"I approached two houses," he replied ruefully; "I got instead of bhiksha, reproaches and scolding of a very virulent type, and at one place, a young man of the house mistaking me for a prowling thief pursued me with a stout stick in his hand. I raced for very life and am here."

His graphic narration made Ramdas burst into laughter. "Consider, Ram, the scoldings and the offer of blows from the stout stick are also bhiksha. You received the former, but why did you refuse to accept the latter, the more precious of the two?" Ramdas remarked humorously.

"Your wit is out of place, Swamiji," he said, not relishing the way in which Ramdas expressed things. "I am hungry and I must have something to eat. I shall not be baulked. I am off again."

And he disappeared once more. In half-an-hour he was back. This time his face indicated fright coupled with a sense of relief at escape from an unpleasant scrape. Ramcharandas was a simple boy, sincere and outspoken.

"Swamiji," he recounted, "two narrow shaves. Soon after I left you, some knocking about brought me to a crowded house and in the front room over a fire I saw roties being prepared. I rushed into the room where a pile of roties was beside the fire. The room was full of men. I stretched out my hands and requested the man at the fire to give me a

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few roties. The man said that they were Pathans and that if I had no objection they could spare a couple of roties for me and also a bit of curry.

"Now a look round presented to my sight a number of rough, burly, ferocious Pathans with shaggy and ominous beards. I lost no time; one leap from the room and I was on the road. I heard a faint rumble of laughter from the direction of the house, but I did not remain there to listen to all that. I took to my heels. I ran wildly without knowing where I was going. Now a row of huts stood before me. Here is food for me, I thought and approached one of the huts. The host welcomed me, and, coming to know the reason of my nocturnal visit, said: "Well, I have no objection to give you food. We have it ready, but I may first warn you that we are chamars or cobblers by caste!" "What!" I exclaimed and the next instant I shot out of the hut like a bullet from a gun and I am here! Hunger is welcome, but tasting food from the hands of Muslims and chamars—well, I draw the line there."

"Ah! Ram," Ramdas exclaimed, "you have failed the test. The distinction you are making is unnatural. You are out for universal vision and yet you adhere to these ignorance-born prejudices! The Muslim and the chamar ought to be the beloved Ram for you. Is He not dwelling in all?"

"You are right," he agreed, "but to rise above the distinction of caste is very hard. Look at the way how I was fooled by it."

"One more attempt," he said and left. In a few minutes he returned with a bland smile.

"Swamiji, come on. We have an invitation for supper in a Hindu household."

Ramdas followed him. The kind host was a touring officer. After the meal they rested on the verandah and early

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at day-break took their departure. By noon they arrived at Kangra. Kangra is a hilly tract of land full of shady trees and clear water springs. The climate here is cool and bracing, and so it is a health resort. Ramdas passing through the streets went outside the city and entering the enclosure of a Mahadeva's temple, beneath two giant banyan trees, sat down on a stone pedestal in front of the temple. Ramcharandas stayed behind in the city. His first concern was to arrange for meals. A visitor to the temple seeing Ramdas came to him.

"Maharaj, I shall be so happy to offer you bhiksha in my house," he said. "Or if you wish to have the food here I shall bring it here."

"Ramji, Ramdas will visit your house for bhiksha," replied Ramdas; "but you have to feed also another who is Ramdas' companion. He will be here presently."

"All right, maharaj, I shall come here to fetch you both at exactly twelve," he said and returned to the city.

Soon after this, Ramcharandas turned up. He informed Ramdas with great delight that after some knocking about he had at last procured an invitation for dinner for two from a pious old mother in the city.

"You need not trouble her, Ram," said Ramdas; "we have an invitation already from a merchant friend of the city. We shall go to him. He will be here to take us at twelve o'clock."

As they returned to the temple, after bathing in a neighbouring tank, the merchant came and escorted them to his house. Ramdas had requested him to feed them with a plain meal. He fed the sadhus with great love.

They stayed in Kangra for four or five days. One night was spent in the company of a sannyasi at his ashram situated in a beautiful spot. The sannyasi was all kindness and hospitality. The latter part of the stay was passed in the Mahadeva's

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temple which they had first visited. Here Ramdas met a doctor, who had newly come to Kangra for health and had taken up his lodgings in the outhouse of the temple. He was extremely kind to Ramdas. He told Ramdas the stories of his extensive travels in Europe. He had visited England, France, Germany and other countries in Europe. He was a well-read man. In the course of his talks he remembered the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish philosopher.

"Swedenborg, the Swede," he related, "when he saw so much misery in the world, once said with great vehemence: 'If I could only find that arch-tyrant God, who created so much misery in the world, I would strangle him to death.' What do you think of this?" he asked.

"If Ramdas were there when he said so, he would have taken the philosopher's hands up to his own throat and urged him to strangle himself, because the misery he sees in the world is of his own making."

When Ramdas' departure from Kangra approached, the doctor pressed on Ramdas a couple of rupees for expenses on the way. Ramdas declined the offer with thanks, but when it was presented to Ramcharandas he accepted the gift in spite of Ramdas' remonstrances.

Leaving Kangra behind, they continued their journey and took their position for the night on the raised platform, beneath a tree at the brink of a well on the outskirts of a village. Here Ramdas proposed to Ramcharandas a separation between them.

"Ram, you may go your own way and gather experience. Ramdas will also go alone. Remember we are both bound for Kashmir. We shall meet in that place."

At first Ramcharandas refused point-blank to accept the proposition. He grumbled, fretted and wept. But Ramdas brought home to him the absolute necessity for such a course,

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as it would be to his own benefit. Through independence alone does a sadhu learn the secrets of life and Truth. Hanging on always to an external prop in spiritual matters hampers his progress, because his vision lacks then the flexibility for expansion and universalization. The centre of interest becomes cramped and localised, while his aim should be to comprehend and realize the infinite nature of Truth.

(iii) God in the form of a serpent

Early at four o'clock next morning, Ramcharandas parted from Ramdas and proceeded on his way, while Ramdas started three hours later. At midday Ramdas came to a temple in a village and rested on a verandah. Here again, a pious householder, who visited the temple, took Ramdas to his house and fed him with rice and curds. The same evening he reached another village, where he spent the night beneath a banyan tree. There was a terrible storm in the night and a countless host of night-flies beset the place where he rested. He watched silently the whole night the ravages of the cyclonic blasts and the officious attentions of innumerable flies.

At daybreak he prosecuted his journey. The foot was nearly healed. The old skin was dropping off and the new skin was getting hardened. At midday he came to the bank of a large tank surrounded by trees near a village mostly peopled by Muhammedans. He took his seat beneath one of the huge trees. A little later he went about the houses for bhiksha. He approached first a small thatched house, where he saw the mother of the house at the front door.

"Will you kindly feed your child with a roti, O mother?" Ramdas begged in Hindi.

"O sadhuji, I am a Muslim by religion while you are a Hindu sadhu. How can you eat food at my hands?" she asked.

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"Ramdas knows no difference between a Hindu and a Muslim. You are his mother and he knows only this relation and nothing else," Ramdas answered.

She at once fetched from her house one roti on which was some chutnee, made of green mangoes. Ramdas, sitting down in the open yard, ate the food and, drinking some water from the hollow of his hands, went up to another house in the neighbourhood. Here also the same story was repeated, because the house he visited happened to be again of a Mussalman. When he told the mothers that he had no objection to eat their food, they gladly served him with a roti and some curry. He had his fill. Now he started to leave the place. The sun was hot. Very often he had travelled in the heat of the mid-day sun without caring for rest.

When he was passing out of the village, a brahman spotted him, and taking him by the arm escorted him to his house and placed before him a full meal. He had no appetite, but the brahman would not let him go without accepting some bhiksha. So, he had to eat another roti at his house. He then left the village and proceeded onwards.

About five o'clock he reached Pathankot. He saw a white tower of a temple on the road-side into which he entered. The moment the pujari of the temple saw him, he showed great delight, as though he had been long looking for Ramdas' coming. He embraced Ramdas with great love and made him sit beside him on a cot. He offered Ramdas a sweet drink and talked to him in a most friendly manner. The night was drawing near.

"Maharaj, Ramdas desires to spend this night in a perfectly solitary room in your mandir. Kindly provide him with such a place," Ramdas pleaded.

The pujari at once said that there was a cave-like room

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underground, at the base of the main temple structure, a place free from the disturbing noises of external life. It had not been in use for a long time. Still it was fit for habitation. Ramdas agreed to occupy it for the night. Taking an old mat, the pujari led him down a flight of stone steps into the semi-dark room, about ten feet square, in the bowels of the earth. Dust lay heavy on the floor which was perhaps unswept for years. He spread the mat on which Ramdas sat and bade the pujari good-night. The pujari left. When night descended on the outside world, the room was merged in inky darkness. There was a single small window to the level of the outer ground.

For hours Ramdas sat on the mat in a state of complete oblivion of his body when he was brought down to the external consciousness by the sound of footsteps. He opened his eyes and saw three persons enter the cave. They had a lantern with them and also a hand harmonium and a tabla. They were the pujari and his friends. The pujari had also brought with him a brass lota full of milk for Ramdas. At his pressure Ramdas drank the milk.

"Maharaj," the pujari then said, "we intend to sing a few songs here. Hence we have come with the musical instruments."

"All right," Ramdas replied, "Ramdas will only be too happy to listen to your music."

The light was placed in the centre of the room and the friends stationed themselves in a line to the left of Ramdas at the base of the staircase. The music commenced. The song was in Hindi composed by a well-known saint. They sang the first verse which meant: "He is a jivanmukta, or a liberated soul, who has discovered the joy of having Ramnam on his tongue." When they finished the first verse, there was a sudden stoppage of their song. The musical instruments also

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ceased to function. Ramdas turned to them to see what the matter was. All the three of them with mouths wide open and frightened eyes were looking in the direction beyond the light on the right side of Ramdas. A venomous snake was observed slowly creeping towards Ramdas. At one bound they stood up as one man and exhorted Ramdas to do the same.

"Let us leave this place, maharaj, I can find you accommodation elsewhere," said the pujari. "That snake is the worst of its kind. It is full of poison from tail to head. Do get up and follow us."

Ramdas was cool and quiet, and replied: "Ram, why are you so afraid of the snake? God himself has given us darshan in that form. He has come with so much love to hear music. He won't do any harm. Sit down and go on with the kirtan."

"Impossible," cried out the pujari, "to sing when the messenger of Yama himself is so close at hand! We are off. We advise you to come away with us."

"Don't give way to fear. The snake will do no harm. You need not sing, but don't run away. You will know that the snake means no ill," urged Ramdas.

They would not sit down. As the serpent crept nearer and nearer to Ramdas, they turned like the hand of a clock and drew round at the tail-end of the serpent. The reptile came quite near Ramdas. He beckoned it and said, "Beloved Ram, come on; don't hesitate."

He had a piece of jaggery tied to his cloth, which he untied and placed before the snake and said: "Beloved Ram, this is the only offering Ramdas can make you, please accept it."

The snake approached the lump of jaggery, and with its forked tongue licked it well for a few seconds and then came onwards. It was now only about two inches from him, but he was sitting stock-still. Somehow, it did not quite approach

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him, but turned its head outwards and took a circuitous path close behind him. As it emerged on the left, the friends moved round to the right side of Ramdas. They took care to see that they always maintained a distance of at least a yard from the tail-end of the snake. The snake now slowly made for the flight of steps and started creeping up from one corner of it.

"Maharaj," cried out the pujari in a tone of anxiety, "there are about forty steps to ascend to reach the higher ground level. The snake goes so leisurely that it might take hours to gain the top. Till then we are caught up here. Also there is no knowing when it might take it into its head to turn back into the cave. We are done for."

"Have no fear. It is going up one corner of the steps. You may safely ascend by the other," Ramdas suggested.

"Nothing of the kind," quickly put in the pujari; "we dare not do it. We have no such trust in it as you have."

Ramdas then proposed to stand midway on the steps, so that they might securely pass up between him and the wall, opposite to the course followed by the snake. They agreed and he took the position indicated by him. One by one, the friends went up the steps, leaping four steps at a time! Before going, they warned him again of the danger, appealing to him to follow them out of the place. They took with them, besides the musical instruments, the lantern also.

Ramdas was again immersed in pitch darkness. He regained his seat on the mat. He groped in the darkness for the lump of jaggery tasted by the serpent, and after some search got it. Being the prasad left by the serpent, he threw it into his mouth and ate it with great delight. He remained in the sitting posture the whole night, absorbed in a blissful trance.

When the first glow of the morning was filtering through the translucent panes of the small window of the cave, he found

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a head peering into the room from a landing step at a sharp corner of the stone staircase. It was the pujari peeping to make sure that Ramdas was alive! Ramdas looked at him and smiled. He then entered the cave room with his friends of the previous night close at his heels. They sat down before him and gazed at him in wonder. Then the pujari's attention was drawn to the spot where the lump of jaggery had been. Not finding it there he questioned Ramdas as to what had become of it. He replied that, being the prasad of the snake, he had eaten it off.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "you are a terrible man."

"Ramdas is not a terrible man," Ramdas returned. "He is only a child and servant of God."

Then Ramdas left the cave room and temple, and proceeded on his journey.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

SUJANPUR—JAMMU

(i) A Divine Pair

Sujanpur is a large town, four miles distant from Pathankot, on the bank of a swift flowing river. Ramdas strolled up to the town in a slow and leisurely fashion. He directed his steps into the yard of a house in which lived the family of a postman of the place. The master of the house was out. His wife, as soon as she saw him, fell at his feet and begged him to be seated on a cot standing in the shade of a tree in front of the house. He complied with her request. Immediately, entering the house, she got a lota of water and a wooden seat. Clearing a part of ground in the yard, she sprinkled water over it and placing the wooden seat in position fetched from the kitchen a plate of a steaming meal for him.

"Maharaj, I am blest by your darshan. Kindly accept our humble hospitality," she appealed turning to Ramdas, her palms joined in salutation.

Ramdas washed his hands and sat down for the dinner offered so promptly and with such love by the mother. He now remembered the words of the sadhu at the Nilkant cave about the unique love and devotion of the Punjabis.

The meal over, the master of the house turned up. What a divine pair God had united together in the persons of the poor postman and his wife!—so humble, so pure and so simple. Blessed was Ramdas that he had the sight of this heavenly couple! They represented the true devotional summit to which the bhakti cult of Hinduism can raise its votaries. All the time, when both the husband and wife were engaged in their service of Ramdas, a four year old child of theirs was lying on a rug

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on a cot close by, reduced to a skeleton from a wasting disease. He approached the bed of the little patient, who was lying quite calm with looks that seemed to gaze into eternity.

The mother with some emotion said: "God gave this child to us, but it appears He wants him back."

"Mother, submit to His will in all matters," assured Ramdas. "Truly He gives and He takes away. His will is supreme and He means always well."

The words brought tears into her eyes, and she smiled in a spirit of complete resignation to God's will.

Some Punjabi friends, who came to see Ramdas, took him out to the bazar wherefrom he was taken from house to house, and petted, fondled and fed by the love-struck mothers. During the four days that he remained at the place, over a dozen mothers went stark-mad over him. They deluged him with their pure and selfless love.

In the evenings, some friends would lead him to the river, where on its bank he used to sit with quite a crowd of visitors around him. Ramdas would then voice in an impassioned language the glory of the divine love. After the lapse of four days, he broached the subject of leaving the place for his long journey to Kashmir. He said that he would go on foot from village to village until he reached the destination.

Among these newly-acquired friends were municipal officers and rich zamindars. They urged him to go by rail as far as Jammu, and they would provide him with a ticket. At first he resisted their offer, as he did not wish to forego the joy of travelling on foot and coming into touch with the devotees of the Punjab in the villages as he passed through them. But the friends were bent upon sending him by train and he had to yield to their loving protestations against journeying on foot.

Before departing from Sujanpur, he paid a last visit to the

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house of the postman and spent a night with him. His wife was in ecstasy over Ramdas' infinite kindness as she termed his wish to stay with them.

Sujanpur was not a railway station. Hence they had to catch the train at Pathankot station. Three tongas full of devotees came with him as far as the railway station to give him a send-off. Most of them were mothers, whose love was boundless. The train started about six o'clock in the morning. They provided him with a drink of fresh milk and made him sit in the inter-class with a supply of sweets and fruits. When the train began to move away from the station, the mothers' hearts welled up with emotion and streams of tears poured down their eyes. He gave them a last namaskar and soon was out of the sight.

(ii) Depend on God and none else

Nine o'clock that night Ramdas reached Jammu, the headquarters of the Kashmir Government during winter. Alighting from the train he made his way to the city along with the other passengers. On the way he had to cross the long bridge on the river Tawi. He was directed by one of the resident sadhus to seek a place of rest in the famous Raghunath temple. He passed the huge doorway that led into the precincts of the temple. The temple was situated in the centre of a vast compound. Till eleven o'clock there was a regular stream of devotees visiting the shrine for darshan. He took up his position on a broad, open, stony platform in front of the outer buildings of the compound. He selected a retired spot away from a crowd of Madrasee sadhus who occupied the platform.

For the first half hour there was a din and bustle of promiscuous talk among them. Then a quarrel started. Filthy abuse characterised the altercations that ensued. The party divided itself into two camps and a right royal battle ensued.

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And for over an hour there was confusion and noise. He looked on the play as an amused witness. He was taught by God to drink only the sweet juice of joy from every situation. Towards midnight the racket gradually died away, except for an occasional outburst of some choice epithets of abuse which the speaker had not been quick-witted enough to remember when the quarrel was in progress. About one o'clock everything was quiet but for the deep, sonorous snores that issued from their direction.

The following day he left the temple premises, when the day, just like a new-born babe was still nestling on the soft and glowing bosom of the morning twilight. He wandered over the place aimlessly and saw hundreds of spires and domes of mandirs shooting up in the sky far above the habitations of Jammu. Truly Jammu is a city of temples.

As he roamed thus, his steps were unconsciously directed towards a temple of unprepossessing appearance. He entered the doorway and took his seat on the raised but dusty dais of a large tree in front of the temple. He observed a small group of devotees visiting the shrine with flowers and offerings. Ramdas' mood at the time was of perfect abandon or self-surrender. His mind was in a state of complete freedom and peace in which the thoughts of the past and plans for the future were totally absent. But his observation of the external world was keen, and he enjoyed the inner calmness as of a dispassionate witness, looking on the strange play of nature revealed before him.

He saw to his right, squatted on an elevated pedestal plastered with cement, a figure—his back turned towards Ramdas—immersed in meditation. His big turban was lying bottom upwards beside him. Ramdas watched him for a while. After a short time, the devotee having finished his prayers, started to depart, his turban properly poised on his head. He descended

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the pedestal and as he did so, his looks fell on Ramdas and their eyes met. He gave Ramdas a namaskar which he returned and the devotee walked out of the temple.

Now it might have been about ten o'clock. He discovered a rectangular, open platform surrounding the temple structure. He selected a cool spot on its right, shaded by trees, and, going up to it, lay down on the hard ground, with a portion of his only cloth spread on the floor, the rest of it completely covering his body. He would always, on such occasions, assume a curled-up posture, his knees drawn up to the face. He had hardly rested there for about ten minutes when he felt somebody uncovering his cloth from off his legs. He bounded up into a sitting posture and discovered a young man beside him.

"Maharaj," he asked, "what kind of food do you usually take? I can supply you with milk and fruits if you like. The panditji who was erstwhile here has sent me with some money so that I may present you with whatever eatables you may desire."

"Ramdas is not particular as to what kind of food he takes," he replied, "he can eat the usual meal of rice, dal, etc."

"Then, will you be so good as to follow me to the house in which the panditji lives? He will be so happy to entertain you."

Ramdas accompanied him and arrived at the panditji's house. He was welcomed by the pandit and many others who lodged with him. They were all Kashmiri pandits employed in the Customs office. They were put up in the same house, their meals being cooked by a male servant. They had their families in Srinagar. It being summer, the heat of Jammu was oppressive and the pandits, unused to the rigours of the weather, were experiencing great discomfort from the heat. The pandit who invited Ramdas, Janakinath Bakshi by name, was

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extremely kind and hospitable. He was duly served with a meal so kindly provided by Janakinath.

Janakinath took a great liking for Ramdas and urged him to remain with him for some days. The young friend who brought him to the house, Jialal Dhar, became his constant companion. He was a student spending his time in Jammu, his school having closed for the vacation. He would take Ramdas out for long walks through the bazar to the banks of the Tawi river. His love for Ramdas was so great that he moved with him like a shadow. He would also join Ramdas in his dances singing the Names of God.

In the evenings, on Janakinath's return home from office, he would have Ramdas exclusively for himself. A few days' society of Ramdas was sufficient to make him, so to say, possessed of Ramdas. He fondled and embraced Ramdas and went into ecstasies in his presence. Thus nearly ten days passed when one night Ramdas told him, that he must be moving from Jammu to Srinagar. At this he showed signs of perturbation.

"No Swamiji," he protested, "you should not leave us so soon. I cannot bear the very thought of it."

"Ramdas has stopped with you for a sufficiently long time," Ramdas replied. "He is on his way to Srinagar. You should not detain him any longer."

"How do you propose to go? I shall see that every obstacle is put in the way of your departure. I can prevent your getting a seat in the buses that daily run to Srinagar." The connection between Srinagar and Jammu was maintained by bus services.

"Ramdas does not depend upon your buses. He will start on foot. They say the distance is only two hundred miles. He will travel by short stages," Ramdas answered.

"Oh," he cried out, "Swamiji, don't you think of venturing

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on foot. The way lies through high mountains, forests and regions of extreme cold."

"Ramdas would not mind all that. Ram, who is his master and mother, will see that he passes through the perils safely, because he goes by His will."

"Well, if you are so determined to go, I shall see that you go by motor-bus. I cannot permit you to travel on foot, but my only wish is that you should give me the pleasure of your company for at least a fortnight more," he appealed.

Ramdas was obdurate. Jialal redoubled his watch. Janakinath set him on to it so that Ramdas might not give them the slip unawares. However, in two or three days, a Kashmiri pandit, who was to return to Srinagar on short leave with his family, volunteered of his own accord to take Ramdas with him. Ramdas agreed to accompany him. They were to start the following day,—the previous evening he had left Janakinath's house when he was not at home, and gone to stay with the new friend who was to be his escort to Srinagar. In the night Janakinath put in an appearance at his friend's house. He tried his utmost to detain Ramdas for some days more, but all to no effect.

"Look here, Swamiji," he at last said, "you are going to a cool place like Srinagar leaving me in this cauldron of boiling heat. Why can you not take me also with you? If you would not do so now, at least after reaching Srinagar you can manage to draw me up to that place."

Meantime, a vacancy in the Srinagar office for which he was qualified had occurred, and Janakinath had applied for it and was awaiting the result with keen anxiety.

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CHAPTER XXXV

KASHMIR

(i) The Kashyapa Bhumi

Next day in the company of the Kashmiri friend and his family, Ramdas left Jammu for Srinagar. The motor-bus that conveyed them traversed through a road cut on the sides of the mountain chains. When the bus trolled onward in its uphill path, it appeared as if an ant was creeping on a huge mound of earth. The landscapes and deep valleys, green with luxuriant verdure and the dense forests of pine, cedar and poplar on the heaven-kissing mountains, presented an enthralling sight of supreme beauty and grandeur. As the bus mounted higher and higher along the spiral path, new and sublime scenes of the majesty of nature unfolded themselves before his eyes and he was thrilled with joy at the enchanting vision.

At dusk the motor-bus reached the top of the Banhal mountain which was nine thousand feet above the sea level. Here the air was rarefied and the climate very cold. The party rested for the night beneath the roof of a resident pandit, who was all kindness and hospitality. The night was severely cold and the kind host covered Ramdas with thick blankets.

The ensuing day about eight o'clock the party continued their journey. They had a halt at midday for meals. At the approach of the evening they sighted Srinagar. The high hill of Shankaracharya with the temple on its top first became visible from a distance.

For the night Ramdas stayed at the house of a pandit of giant proportions, a relation of the friend under whose escort he had travelled on the bus. All the people of the house were

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kind and hospitable. Next day, making enquiries for the house of Janakinath, Ramdas shifted to his dwelling. Janakinath's younger brother, Amarnath Bakshi, welcomed him and provided him with a separate, small room. Amarnath, Janakinath's daughters, children, wife and everyone in the house looked after him with great love and treated him as one of the family.

Amarnath Bakshi, a double M.A. of the Punjab University, was a Professor of Philosophy in Sir Pratap College of Srinagar, and had achieved the distinction of first rank in the Presidency, both in Philosophy and Psychology. He is a noble, gentle and quiet-natured young man. He held Ramdas in high regard and was punctiliously attentive to his requirements.

Janakinath's three daughters were constantly in attendance on him. The elder two of them, pure and glorious souls—veritable goddesses—tended and fed him with all the tenderness and care of a mother. Whenever they were with him he would feel that they always carried with them the fragrance of purity, simplicity and innocence. The younger children also had a great attraction for him. They would play, laugh and dance with him. While starting to school and on their return, some of them would straight come to him and embrace him with great fondness. The mother of the house also sought his society and felt very happy in his presence. Altogether his life in that blessed house was filled with inexpressible love and joy.

Ramdas resided in Kashmir for over three months. As on the Hardwar side the pilgrimage to Badrinath and Kedarnath is considered to be of high importance, so also a visit to Amarnath is held in Kashmir to be of equally great consequence. There were still two months more for the pilgrimage and hence he had to wait in Srinagar for those months, as he did not want to lose the opportunity of running up and witnessing the sublimity of the charming mountains of Kashmir at their lofty

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heights.

Meanwhile, he had much to observe and much experience to gather in Srinagar and its suburbs. The early part of his stay was in the city of Srinagar. The houses are of old style, built of mud, and ill-ventilated and also thickly crowded. The lanes between them are narrow and full of filth and dirt. The principles of sanitation and laws of hygiene seemed to have played no part in the adjustment of life and house-building in the city. If one wanted to know what the slums were like, one had to walk through the streets of this city and dwell for some time in the houses that were huddled up pell-mell in this phenomenally unhealthy place.

The population consists of over ninety-five percent of Mohammedans, the rest being pandits of Kashmir. Kashmir came to be called by that name because of Kashyapa, the great sage, who lived there ages ago. The pandits are a very intelligent class and learned in Sanskrit. Now they have also a first-grade college, Sir Pratap College, which turns out brilliant men of first-rate University qualifications. They are a quiet and good-natured people with a strong and well-built physique. The extreme cold of the winter, during which, it is said, the whole valley of Kashmir is overlaid with snow, serves to wash away the dirt and cesspools that accumulate in summer. The cold at other times of the year might tend, to some extent, to destroy the disease-breeding germs that the foul vapours, arising from the insanitary streets and surroundings, produce. But the general health of the people in the city is not up to the mark.

(ii) The ways of Kashmiris

The dress of the people is characteristic of the rigours of the climatic conditions. Both the males and females wear a long toga or pheran, as they call it, reaching below the knees,

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made invariably of wool either of coarse pattu or of fine texture called pashmina. The sleeves of these gowns extend beyond the hands, the loose ends serving the purpose of gloves to protect the hands from cold. The old folk go about with the pheran, high-heeled wooden sandals having straps made of grass ropes covering their feet and an old-fashioned turban, while the young men use boots and shoes, tight pants, long coats and turbans after the Punjabi style.

The women adhere to their old mode of dress, the pheran with long sleeves. These have a small white veil covering only the back part of the head, and above the forehead they have a white celluloid band to signify that they are married. The unmarried and the widow are without this band. The ornaments the women wear are of the Muslim style; a number of thin wide rings are pierced through the edge of the ears. They have the custom of wearing the crimson mark on the forehead, which is conspicuously absent among the Punjabi ladies.

The Pandits are a fair-complexioned race. Some of the young Panditanis, Ramdas saw in Kashmir, possessed a beauty in feature and colour, which was quite unique and ethereal. Their gait was peculiarly their own. They would walk in all their majesty and stateliness like veritable queens.

The spoken language of both the Muslims and Pandits is a strange mixture of several tongues, Sanskrit, Urdu and Persian. It has no script. The written language, for all business, legal and other purposes, is Urdu.

The fertile valley of Kashmir was in the past, before the advent of the British in India, a cynosure in the eyes of the Persian invaders, who raided and pillaged the place, converting by force most of the Hindu population to Islam. The present generation of Muslims in Srinagar are the descendants of pandits converted during the invasions and reigns of Muslim kings.

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In language and mode of dress a Muslim and a pandit have no difference. The distinction is made out from the absence of the sandal mark between the eye-brows on the face of the Muslim, while the mark is very prominent on that of the pandit.

In regard to food, it is almost common between the two communities. Both of them are rice and meat eaters. The hubble-bubble used in smoking is in evidence in every house, and they have almost a craze for tea drinking, which they do four or five times a day. For keeping warm in winter they do not use the stoves employed by Europeans in their houses in Europe. They have small portable firepots called kangdi made of willow basket having a handle of the same material, with an earthen, bowl-like vessel fitted into it. Charcoal is used to make fire in the bowl. These kangdis are kept within their pheran causing the heat to radiate all over the body underneath the gown.

The staple food being rice the cultivation is mainly of rice ches, pears, berries, etc., can be had in plenty and very cheap. The principal vegetable they are very fond of, and without which they can hardly relish their dinner, is sag of kadamb. Ghee and milk are seldom used by them. They take plenty of curds and cheese. Milk is abundant in Srinagar. Although the Muslim element is in the majority, there is no cow-slaughter in Kashmir, as the Maharaja's Government have prohibited it. The fruits of Kashmir are of the cold climate, and apples, peaches, pears, berries, etc., can be had in plenty and very cheap.

The religion of the Pandits is Shaivism and Shakti worship. They are opposed to the order of sannyas denoting external renunciation. There are sadhus among the Pandits and they are mostly householders leading a religious life. The pandit is proud of his learning and intellectual attainments. He would say: "Where the Western philosophy ends there the Eastern

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philosophy begins; where the Eastern philosophy ends there the Kashmiri philosophy begins." The pandits are undoubtedly an intelligent and keen-witted race. Their status as brahman prevented them from taking up avocations of manual labour, trade and handicrafts, in which fields the Muslims are widely employed. The world-renowned Kashmir shawls are made by the skilled Muslim weavers. In wood carving, furniture making and papier-mache work the craftsmen of Kashmir are famous. Pandits go in only for the learned professions, but now these departments being over-crowded, they are slowly entering trade and other lines of employment.

Music is unknown among them. They sing in a droll and droning voice the Sanskrit slokas and mantras in chorus, their intonation having a distinctive touch of Persian accent.

The women in Srinagar are very backward in education, while the husbands are Bachelors and Masters of Arts. In many cases the wives are perfectly illiterate and except their Kashmiri jargon, a mixed language, through which alone they can convey their thoughts verbally, they have no other means of intercourse. But late or post-puberty marriages are very common among them. Often the girls are allowed to grow up to seventeen or eighteen years of age before they are married. The dowry system amongst them is as pernicious an incubus as in other parts of India.

Ramdas had an occasion to attend a marriage ceremony of the Pandits. When the ritual was in progress and the purohits were breathlessly chanting the mantrams, Ramdas went into the room where the celebration was held, to see the bride and bridegroom. The bridegroom could be seen whereas the bride was completely covered with a veil made of a thick white sheet of cloth. It is clear that many customs of the pandits are borrowed from the Muslims, whose close contact with

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them, probably for centuries, has influenced them into adopting many of their customs and modes of living. Ramdas attended their marriage feast, but he did not partake of it as he was mostly on milk diet during his sojourn in Srinagar. The hundreds of guests assembled for the occasion were served food on the floor on which they were made to sit in three or four long rows, as is the vogue in other parts of India. But what struck Ramdas as uncommon was that the guests were served meals in big earthen bowls.

The relations between the Muslims and pandits are very cordial. The Muslims, amongst whom illiteracy prevails to an amazing degree, are naturally undeveloped in moral culture, clean living and refined manners, although they are accomplished in arts, handicrafts, trade and agriculture. The Muslims have free access to the houses of pandits. They can even enter the kitchen and the dining rooms of the pandits.

Untouchability is unknown among Kashmiris, and in the Hindu fold, caste distinction has no place, except that the pandits make some difference in the various grades among themselves based upon the traditional superiority and prestige of ancestry. But there is free inter-dining and inter-marriage among all classes of pandits.

Regarding the produce of the land, in addition to rice and fruit, of which latter, a large quantity is exported to other parts of India, the people cultivate saffron or keshar in special fields at the close of the summer. The soil of Kashmir is rich and alluvial.

(iii) Hari Parvat

For some days Ramdas did not move out of the house of Janakinath. The first outing was in the company of the lads of the house who took him to the playground, an oblong plot of plain land covered with a thick green turf, one side of which

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was bordered by an avenue of tall poplars. He watched the sports of the boys. Here he came in touch with some educated Muslims who surrounded him on the turf and put him various questions on religious and spiritual matters. Since his sympathies were alike for all the religions of the world, he spoke sometimes in English and again in Hindi about the greatness of the Prophet Mohammed and the value of the teachings of Koran. They eagerly listened to his expositions and evinced friendliness and love for him.

He was paying every evening a visit to the playground for some days. Then the young friends escorted him to Hari Parvat. Hari Parvat is a hill situated about a mile from the city of Srinagar. The pandits look upon this hill with great reverence since there is also a temple of a goddess on one side at its top. They give a religious significance to a walk round the hill, for which purpose hundreds of pandits and their women are seen every morning pouring out of their congested houses. The morning exercise and the fresh air in the open also tend to a great extent to counteract the evil effects upon their health due to the unhealthy vapours of the dirty city in which they live most of the time. The stroll and a darshan of the goddess on the hill they consider as nothing short of a religious duty, since on each such occasion they can withdraw their minds entirely from the cares of the world to the thought of God.

On the other side of the hill is a neatly-built fortress, once the stronghold of the old kings of Kashmir. Ramdas visited the temple of the goddess, who is represented by a huge rock, flat on the side facing those who go to it for darshan. This flat surface is covered over by a thick layer of red paint and decorated with flowers and flower garlands. There are a few resident pandits inside the temple building who are the

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worshippers of the goddess.

He was attracted by the cool and bracing breeze on top of the hill and spent a night alone on a stone slab lying about fifty yards in front of the Devi's temple. The deep love which Amarnath bore for Ramdas made him display great anxiety about him at this time. He remained on the hill till evening on the ensuing day. Amarnath visited him in the morning and arranged for his milk. The legend goes that the hill was the trysting place of Sapta-rishis—the seven ancient sages, the invisible guides and teachers of mankind.

Ramdas had frequent occasions to roam around this hill. Along the path is a small temple in charge of sannyasis. When he visited this temple he came in contact with a young sannyasi, Anand Swarup of the Gowd Saraswat community and a native of Cochin State. He had his residence in a small room in the upper storey of a rest-house near the temple. He was a sincere sadhaka who lived a retired life, filling his hours with a deep study of the scriptures and in spiritual discipline and contemplation. Ramdas enjoyed many blissful hours in his company. He was so kind and loving to Ramdas.

The main river of Kashmir is Jhelum or Vitatsa as the pandits denominate it, a tributary of the Indus. The river flows right through the middle of Srinagar and on both the banks of it are studded the residences of pandits and Muslims of the place. The habitations in many cases projects out into the river, supported on wooden posts. The river is held very sacred by the pandits, but all the drains of the city empty themselves into it and render its water thick, dark, muddy and impure. The pandits wash and bathe in the waters of this stream. Long and slim boats which they call kisti ply on the river. The boats are manned by Muslims. For pleasure-trips and sight-seeing these light boats are largely employed by the populace. Kisti-

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walas carry on a roaring business. A number of wooden bridges are constructed across the river to connect opposite banks.

One day a student friend, who was visiting Ramdas at Janakinath's house, proposed to take him up the Shankaracharya hill. He and Ramdas boarded a kisti. The skiff glided up the river until it came to a landing place at the foot of the hill. After a short walk they reached the bottom of the hill, where there was an ashram of sannyasis. The spot is called Durga Nag, because of a pure spring in the compound of the ashram — Nag meaning a spring.

(iv) Shankaracharya Hill

The friend and Ramdas now started ascending the Shankaracharya hill. The hill is a thousand feet above the level of the Kashmir valley. As they climbed higher and higher, Ramdas found as if a screen was slowly being lifted to reveal the grandiose beauty of Kashmir. They reached the top, and a sweeping look all round thrilled Ramdas with a feeling of inexpressible ecstasy. The extensive and picturesque valley was now before him. The stately mountains tinted with a subtle blending of blue and heliotrope and crowned by dazzling flakes of snow were standing in all their dignity at the borders of the valley all round, like guardian angels of the land.

The vast lakes, scattered all over the valley, scintillated in the sun like huge mirrors reflecting the glory of the mountains and the groves of trees covered with green foliage. The Dal lake, the largest of them, at the base of the hill on which he was viewing the scene, bore on her placid bosom big, red, lotus flowers, beside which swans gambolled and sported.

From the height Hari Parvat was seen as a small mound of earth, the brown walls of the fortress standing out

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prominently on its top. Then again the river Jhelum: she was running in a zigzag course like a huge serpent creeping through the enchanting valley. The grey, dull houses in the city were visible from a long distance. What with the flashes of water, the greenness of the vegetation, the multi-hued mountain ranges and the clear blue sky above, the scenery was such that his eyes feasted on the sublimity of God's fascinating creation or manifestation.

He turned his attention to the temple. It is contructed of blocks of granite stones, oval in shape at the top and ending in a dome. It has a raised square platform on its sides. A flight of stone steps leads the visitor to the sanctum sanctorum in which the phallic emblem of Shiva, an image about three feet high, smooth and polished, stands. A sadhu is in constant attendance in the temple during the day-time. At the top of the temple dome and all round, at the lower ground level, are installed electric flash-lights with huge reflectors. These are said to be a gift made by the Maharaja of Mysore during his visit to Srinagar. In the night, even from long distances from the valley below, these lights illumine the location and structure of the temple.

The great Vedantin, Sri Shankaracharya, when he visited Kashmir in his parivrajak or itinerant life, is said to have made his stay on this hill, and it was at his initiative that the temple of Shiva was first established on the hill. Hence to this day the hill is called after his name. The pandits have a story in connection with Sri Shankaracharya's visit.

Sri Shankaracharya and his disciples took their abode on the top of this hill for several days, and none of the pandits of Srinagar went up to see them and accorded them hospitality. So the sage and his disciples had to go without food and water. After some days a few pandits paid a visit to him on

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the hill.

Now the sage observed: "We have been starving here for many days and you, great and learned as you are, did not think it fit to offer us the hospitality which the shastras enjoin on every human being as his or her dharma."

To this the pandits replied:

"The fault is not ours. We would certainly welcome and treat with respect and kindness those guests who would visit our city, but since you have chosen to occupy a hill, far away from the city, avoiding and renouncing the life of the world, in which also the Lord's power and glory are manifest, we are justified in our attitude towards you and your disciples. As regards your starvation, you need not have undergone it if you had possessed the yogic power by the exercise of which you could have provided yourself with all that you needed."

Sri Shankaracharya was a monist or adwaitist who looked upon the world as illusion. Probably he did not then believe in God's Shakti in manifestation.

He replied: "The world is an illusion. It has no existence although it seems to be existing to one whose mind is obsessed by ignorance."

"You are mistaken," retorted the pandits, "the world does exist; it is the expression of divine Shakti, the supreme cause of creation, protection and destruction of all the visible forms that comprise the universe. External renunciation of the world is a folly springing from a false conception of God and His power. Shakti is sporting in the vast phenomena of life, change and movement in the universe. The true vision does not discard the world as non-existent but looks upon it as the manifestation of God, the lila of His Shakti."

To show Sri Shankaracharya an example of the workings of Shakti, it is said that a pandit invoked the Goddess with

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the incantation of a mantra and touched a spot on the ground where they sat, and instantly water as from a fountain oozed out of the ground.

The pandits say that Sri Shankaracharya was greatly impressed by the teachings and the exhibition of God's power by the pandits, and had to change his line of thought for the one represented by the pandits.

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CHAPTER XXXVI

KASHMIR—(Contd.)

(i) The lake of the mind

Another day which was Sunday, Amarnath Bakshi took Ramdas out on an excursion to the famous gardens of Kashmir, Shalimar and Nishad Bag. In order to reach the gardens they had to slide over the glassy surface of the Dal lake on a kisti. The boat passed through the river and the canals that led up to the lake displaying as it proceeded, willows and dense vegetation along the banks of the canals. An hour's trip brought them at the landing of the Nishad Bag.

They made their way inside the garden. The scene that now spread out before the gaze of Ramdas was of exquisite charm and grace. The garden was symmetrical in its formation, a wide sheet of pure sparkling water like a band was running down, right through the middle of the garden grounds. On both sides of this shallow stream were laid out carefully designed beds of flower plants and trees of various species. The yellow and blue, crimson and white, violet and orange colours of the flowers vied with one another in lending a bewitching charm to this floral picture, painted in nature's own variegated tints. The rose, the lily, the chrysanthemum, the marigold, the carnation, the daisy, the violet and the bluebell displayed their brilliant freshness in profusion.

The evergreen, cone-shaped fir trees and the giant chenar, a tree peculiar to Kashmir, cast their deep but cool shade in the garden. As they walked up the plot which is made up into several flats, he saw hundreds of fountains at work sending forth their spray twenty feet up into the air. On a higher

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level in the centre of the garden is situated a solid structure supported on polished stone pillars. The surrounding view of the garden is also most imposing. The garden is laid out at the foot of mountains which form its background with the extended stretch of the Dal lake in its front.

The Shalimar garden is in several respects an exact replica of the Nishad Bag. These gardens were first put up by Shahjahan and Jehangir, the famous Moghul kings. These picturesque grounds are indeed the paradise of the Mohammedans.

While on their return journey by the same kisti in which they had proceeded to the gardens, Amarnath narrated a legal perplexity with which the magistrates of Kashmir were confronted. While in other places movable property, such as money and other articles are subjects of theft, here landed property is also stolen. The lakes have a thick growth of stout reeds and these areas are converted into floating fields for cultivation. Bits of these fields are often cut off by the owners of the adjoining fields with thieving propensities, and are slid over the surface of the water and tacked on to their own, which action results in law suits. By evening the party returned to the city.

Ramdas also paid visits to Vicharnag, a place shaded by giant chenar trees and with a tank famous for its sanctity, and Ram Bagh with its beautiful flower gardens and the storied dharmashala for travellers, both the sites being outside the city precincts.

Another day he made a trip to Harvan, a charming retreat, nine miles from Srinagar. The landscape, the lake and the running stream of dazzling water with the background of high mountains full of vegetation comprised a most fascinating sight. He felt the subtle spell of the place. The lake stood

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on a higher level facing the mountains. When he first saw it, a soft breeze was blowing over its bosom moving the limpid, transparent waters into ripples that suffused its surface. During the half-hour's saunter amidst the attractive scenes he directed his gaze again to the lake. The breeze had stopped and the lake shone like a huge mirror, its surface now placid, calm and still, reflecting the glorious picture of the surrounding mountains.

Pointing to the lake, Ramdas remarked to Amarnath: "The human mind can be compared to this lake. When the breeze of maya sweeps on the lake of the mind, waves of desire rise, disturbance ensues, but no sooner does maya cease to play on it than it becomes calm and peaceful as it is seen now, revealing a vision of unsurpassed splendour and joy." Before dark they got back to Srinagar.

Being of a sincere and lovable nature, Amarnath was acutely feeling the separation of Janakinath, his elder brother, who with many other pandits of his department, by a strange act of the Kashmir Government, was ordered to remain in Jammu for all seasons of the year. About the time of Ramdas' departure from Jammu, a post in the department had become vacant in Srinagar for which Janakinath was eligible, and he had applied for it. Amarnath was in his anxiety exerting all his influence with the authorities to bring about the desired transfer. He would every day, during this time, come to Ramdas.

"Swamiji, do pray for the success of my brother," he would say. "Janakinath is so unhappy at Jammu in this hot weather and his family here is also miserable on account of his absence from their midst."

Ramdas would then simply assure him: "Trust God. Give up anxiety and all will be well."

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Day after day was spent by the brother and the family on the tenter-hooks of expectation. A week thus passed. One day Amarnath came to him and reported with a face bright and smiling:

"Swamiji, at last my brother got the appointment. I have a wire from him to say that he will be here in a short time to join the post; this is all your kindness."

"God be praised for it," replied Ramdas. "It is all His doing."

Before the end of the next week Janakinath was in Srinagar. The first thing he did, as he entered his house, was to rush up to the room in which Ramdas lived, take him in his arms and clasp him in a fast and fond embrace lasting for several minutes. Now the whole household brightened up with cheer and happiness.

(ii) Kabir and Uddhav

During his stay in Kashmir Ramdas had to carry on a large amount of correspondence with the friends in different parts of India. Once he received a letter from U. Sanjivarao of Bombay asking him to see a Saraswat of North Kanara who was then holding a prominent post under the State Government. Durgadas Nagarkatte was the Director of Industries for Kashmir State. The letter also spoke of his ailment, bone tuberculosis, that affected his legs as a result of which he was completely disabled from walking except on crutches. Ramdas understood that Durgadas was a busy man and so would not have thrust himself on him (Durgadas) had the thought of his physical condition not moved Ramdas. However, he took Sanjivarao's suggestion and in company with two pandits proceeded to Durgadas' residence. The party was made to wait in his office-tent in front of his bungalow, while Ramdas had to send him a note as a visiting card. He mentioned in the

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note simply that he was a sadhu from Kanara and had directions to see him.

Even after twenty minutes' waiting there was no response to the note. Word was then sent to him to know definitely if he would like to grant Ramdas an interview. The only reply that he got was that Durgadas was far from eager to receive him!

Now Ramdas turning to the pandits said: "God's will seems to be that he should not see Durgadas. So we shall retrace our steps to Janakinath's. While returning they saw the huge pile of buildings of the Industrial School. The pandits proposed to have a look round the school. Accordingly they entered the building and passed from chamber to chamber examining the products of various industries, in which a practical course of training was given to the students by experts employed for the purpose. The experts were most affable and obliging to Ramdas. When he entered a class room where a batch of students was receiving theoretical instructions the teacher resigned his seat to him, who converted the class for a short half-hour into one of religious instruction. He delivered a discourse on God, devotion and His Name. Both the teacher and the boys were highly elated by his presence and the talk.

Leaving this room the party finished the inspection on the ground floor and ascended upstairs. Here they entered a research laboratory where a couple of students were engaged in some experiments. One of them led the party to the office room of the professor in charge, an Indian, seated at his table. Seeing him the professor welcomed him and offered a chair. He sat down. In the course of his talk Ramdas told him how he was refused audience by Durgadas. The professor had taken a sudden liking for him.

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"There must be some mistake. Durgadas does not know you, but would certainly be happy to see you," eagerly said the professor and added: "I shall send a boy to let him know about you and see that you get an interview with him. Meanwhile, please wait here."

He at once despatched a student to Durgadas' bungalow. In the meantime the kind professor showed him many pieces of intricate apparatus intended for various works of research. Ramdas looked through a microscope and saw a speck of wheat flour as big as a pea. These scientific instruments can reveal only things perceptible to the senses but in the field of spirit they are utterly useless, because the vision of the spirit can be had by the sole aid of a super-consciousness which is beyond the sphere of the senses.

Soon after this, a young man came from Durgadas' household to fetch him. Ramdas met Durgadas in his office. He was an elderly man, tall and of dark complexion. He attempted to rise from the chair when Ramdas entered the room, but his complaint prevented him from doing so. He pointed to a chair in front of him and Ramdas sat down. A few words explained to him the reason of Ramdas' visit. He gave a short account of his disease and then called for some refreshments for Ramdas from which he drank a cup of milk. He was then on mere milk diet. Durgadas was evidently a busy man. He was engaged with a visitor when Ramdas went to him and many others were waiting outside for their turns. Now Ramdas stood up to depart, but Durgadas would not have it so.

"You have been so long in Srinagar," he said, "and I had no opportunity to have you with me. I will not allow you to go until you have spent some days at ours as well."

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His repeated appeals induced Ramdas to remain. The pandit escorts who were waiting outside were told of the decision, and they took leave and returned to their homes. Ramdas had stipulated two conditions for his stay: one was that he would during the time live only on milk diet and that the following day he should be permitted to go back to the city as he had shortly to leave for Amarnath on pilgrimage. Durgadas would not agree to the latter condition.

Ramdas was given a separate spacious room on the upper floor of his palatial residence and was provided with every convenience. The mothers of the house were extremely kind in their attentions. Here Ramdas had the constant society of Durgadas' two little sons, Kabir and Uddhav. Ramdas enjoyed their playful society and lisping talks. On account of his disability, Durgadas could not come up to the room in which Ramdas lived. Next day, in the afternoon, Ramdas went down and directly going to his office-room announced his desire to leave for the city. Expostulation was useless. The young man of the house had to take him back to Janakinath's where he was welcomed by all in the household with manifest delight.

About this time he received a letter from mother Elizabeth written at the instance of Raja Ram, the Thakore Saheb of Limbdi. Raja Ram offered to furnish him with a note of introduction to the Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh, if he felt an inclination to see him. Ramdas replied that Ram did not prompt him from within to go in for a darshan of the Maharaja, but might agree in the matter, if the Maharaja himself had expressed a desire to see him. So he asked Raja Ram to correspond with the Maharaja and know his mind. He had nothing to gain by seeing anybody. He was controlled and guided by Ram in all things. As the matter was dropped nothing further came of it.

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(iii) The mysterious ways of God

Ramdas' stay in Srinagar by this time had extended over two months and the coveted pilgrimage to Amarnath was fast approaching. Janakinath argued with Ramdas a great deal and made an attempt to dissuade him from the proposed pilgrimage. He expatiated on the severity of the cold in that region and the difficult ascents on the hills that led up to it. But Ramdas was determined.

Ramcharandas now suddenly turned up. He was very emaciated and his feet were worn out and full of blisters. Since they separated near Pathankot in the Punjab, he said that he had to undergo most dreadful trials and hardships. What with the cold, continuous tramping on foot and often starvation, he had been reduced to a terrible plight. With perfect rest, added to the tender care and nursing of the loving daughters of Janakinath, he soon became his old self.

In the company of mother Taravati, wife of Janakinath, and her small children, Ramdas and Ramcharandas went for the darshan of Khir Bhavani about ten miles from the city. This shrine is situated beneath the vast spreading branches of the chenar with the river Sindhu flowing on two sides of it. It is noted for the temple of the goddess Bhavani. The temple, a small structure, is in the centre of the grounds erected at the edge of a deep rectangular pit constructed of brick and cement. This pit is intended for receiving presents of rice and milk pudding offered to the goddess. This is her favourite prasad; hence her name Khir Bhavani. The accumulation of pudding, thrown into the pit by hundreds of devotees, who daily visit the shrine, gave out a stench that filled the atmosphere. No effort was made to keep the pit clean—may be, there was some religious significance in allowing the pudding to rot in the pit.

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Mother Taravati performed her puja of the goddess with the help of a pandit priest. By evening they returned to Janakinath's house at Srinagar.

"How do you like the spot Khir Bhavani?" asked Janakinath.

"The place is all right but it is a pity that the goddess should be imprisoned for all time in the midst of the most nauseating odour emanating from khir kund," replied Ramdas.

"True, that is also my opinion," he said laughing.

One evening, a short time before the day fixed for starting on the pilgrimage to Amarnath, Janakinath said to Ramdas:

"Swamiji, I wish so much I could accompany you on the pilgrimage to Amarnath, but God's will is different. My new appointment does not admit of my taking leave just at present. However, one of my relations with his family intends going. He will have a tent of his own. I have requested him to include you and Ramcharandas in his party and he has agreed. I am also arranging for warm clothing for you both."

The day of departure came. It was to be on the morrow. The previous evening Janakinath met Ramdas with a downcast face, his heart sorely disturbed. The fact was, his relation had turned turtle at almost the last hour with regard to taking Ramdas with him to Amarnath, and had sent word to that effect. Hence the dejection on the face of the friend.

"Swamiji," he said, "it appears to be the will of God that you should not go to Amarnath; else my relation would not have withdrawn his promise at the last moment."

At this Ramdas drew himself up, and his body stiffened with a grim determination.

"Ramji," Ramdas replied in a firm and measured tone,

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looking directly into the eyes of Janakinath, "do you think that Ramdas proposed to start on the journey to Amarnath depending on your relation? God, whose servant and child he is, had put the idea into his head and it is His duty to see that it is fulfilled. There is nothing impossible for the Lord. He will yet see that Ramdas is safely led to the shrine of Amarnath."

Now Janakinath, who was observing the mood in which Ramdas was and the force with which he spoke, calmly replied:

"Well, Swamiji, I am mistaken. Surely there could be no obstacle for you when you have resolved upon doing a thing." The subject was then dropped.

On the banks of the Jhelum there is a temple of Shiva, only about fifty yards from Janakinath's house. The pujari of the temple, Tarachand Bayu, a young man who had great love and regard for Ramdas, used to visit Janakinath's house to see and have talks with him. Some of the old type pandits can understand Hindi and also talk in that language with a mixture of Urdu words. Ramdas mostly talked in Hindi with the ladies and pandits who were not English educated. Tarachand Bayu would take Ramdas to his temple for bath in the river. Many an evening he had spent in the shrine listening to the reading of Yoga Vasishta in Hindi and attending the evening puja in the temple, when Sanskrit slokas and mantras were sung in chorus by a dozen devotees who would be present at the time of worship.

On the morning of the day when Ramdas had to start on the pilgrimage to Amarnath, Tarachand Bayu dropped in and escorted him to the temple. Ramcharandas was also with him. After bath Ramdas sat in front of the image on an asan

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provided by the pujari. The time might have been about eight o'clock. A young pandit, who was a perfect stranger to Ramdas, entered the temple in haste. He had come on a bicycle and inquired for Ramdas. The pujari brought the pandit into the presence of Ramdas.

"Swamiji," the young man said to Ramdas, "my father is making ready for the trip to Amarnath. He wishes to take you also with him. Kindly come with me. He is awaiting your arrival at home."

Strange are the ways of God! Here is a pandit utterly unknown to Ramdas voluntarily proposing to have him as his companion on the trip. He followed the young guide, and told him that he would have to see Janakinath first and inform him of his intended departure. So they went to Janakinath's house and apprised the friend of the arrangement made by God for the pilgrimage. Janakinath, on hearing of it, was spell-bound. Until then it had seemed that there was not the least chance of Ramdas' leaving that day. The mysterious and sudden way in which God brought about circumstances that favoured his going struck Janakinath as purely the work of Providence. The Lord after all did not will that Ramdas should abandon the idea. Ramdas for his part was absolutely confident that he would go on the pilgrimage.

The warm dress intended for Ramdas and Ramcharandas was still with the tailor unfinished. A woollen cap and a double-breast jacket were intended for Ramdas and a long cloak of the same material for Ramcharandas. Ramdas did not care for the clothes. He felt God's command had come and it was his to obey at any cost. So with two small pieces of khaddar cloth he started. It was decided that Ramcharandas should start on the following day with the woollen dress and

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meet Ramdas at Mattan or Martand, the first stage in the journey where there would be a halt for two days. Ramdas duly reached the pilgrim pandit's house where he had his meal. The pandit was an elderly man, tall and strongly built. By twelve o'clock they got into a motor-bus which carried them by evening to Mattan.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PILGRIMAGE TO AMARNATH

(i) The scuffle over Ramdas

At night Ramdas and the pilgrim pandit were lodged in a house of another pandit, a resident of Mattan and friend of the escort. Next morning Ramdas came out of the house to have a view around. The importance of Mattan lies firstly in its clear spring of water which is collected in a small reservoir kept scrupulously clean and in which fishes sport—it is a delight to see and drink and bathe in this cool, transparent water—and secondly in the old ruins of the Martand temple at a higher altitude. He paid a visit to the ruins; except for the outer fallen walls and a dilapidated middle arched door-way, there remains nothing of the temple. The ruins strike the observer with an idea of the majesty, hugeness and solidity of the structure when it was sound and whole. He spent an hour amidst these ruins, witnessing the surrounding landscape. The temple was of God Martand, hence the name.

Another morning, as he was tramping along the main road towards a cave, a mile and a half from Mattan, he met at the outskirts a crowd gathered on the road. When he neared it he heard a violent altercation in progress between a pandit and a sparsely clothed sadhu. From their talk Ramdas could make out that the sadhu had beaten a pandit in his own house for refusing to give him some firewood for which the sadhu had gone a begging to his door. There was a commotion over the affair.

Ramdas passed on and reached the wayside hill. Ascending a few yards he came up to the narrow mouth of a cave.

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A little away, at the front of the cave to its right, was seated a girl in sannyasi robes before a fire. He was drawn to the place. By her side was a shallow gap in the hill which she had made her temporary abode. She was quite happy to see him and he took a seat before her at the fire. She had some milk which she heated on the fire and presented to him, and he drank the beverage sweetened with her pure love. She was a cheerful, free and dauntless girl—such are indeed of the kingdom of happiness.

With a lighted splinter of wood provided by the sannyasini and which burnt like a candle, Ramdas entered the dark, narrow alley leading to the cave which was in the bosom of the elevated hill. The walls of the passage and the interior of the cave were dripping with water issuing from a hidden spring. There were two compartments in the cave, in the larger of them was the murti of Mahadev, and in the other, a raised slab of stone under which, it was said, lay the bones of a saint who had lived there and given up his body. After a few minutes' inspection of the cave he came out, and bidding adieu to the young mother returned to Mattan.

Ramdas marked a look of anxiety on the face of the pandit escort. When questioned about it he disclosed the reason with great hesitation.

"Maharaj," he said, "the thing that worries me is this. We have to start higher up tomorrow or day after. As we ascend the hills the cold will become more and more severe. I have brought blankets and clothing sufficient only for one, whereas you do not possess any for your use except the inadequate cotton sheets. I am told that some warm clothing would be sent to you through a friend of yours, but so far there is no sign of him. What shall we do?"

"Leave the matter to Ram. He will see to it, please don't

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worry," Ramdas replied.

Bus-load after bus-load of pilgrims was arriving at Mattan throughout the day and he was set upon by the pandit the task of watching the arrival of Ramcharandas. Till half-past-four he sat on a low wall of a bridge where the incoming motor-buses halted.

Suddenly a young man, dressed in the latest fashion of Srinagar, and a high yellow turban, came towards him and taking him by the arm said:

"There you are, Ramdas, I have caught you. You are to go with me to Amarnath. Although you may not remember me, I have seen you at the Nishad Bag with Amarnath Bakshi who was my teacher and is now a great friend of mine. He had asked me to take care of you; come along. I am a doctor. My name too is Amarnath. I go with the hospital camp that travels with the pilgrims as far as Amarnath with the object of looking after the health of the pilgrims. I have for myself a separate tent to which you are quite welcome. You will not be wanting in warm clothes and blankets. I have plenty of them to spare for you."

Ram takes Ramdas always by surprise.

"Ramji," Ramdas spoke to the doctor, "Ramdas came here in the company of a pandit who has been very kind to him. Ramdas must let him know of the new arrangement."

"Come with me first," he said with mock authority which was always his way; such a kind and loving soul he was! "I do not want you to slip out of my hands. Come with me to my tent. I know the pandit you speak of. I shall send for him and talk the matter over with him. You need not bother about it."

Catching Ramdas by the arm the doctor led him to a tent pitched on a flat plot of ground under the shade of trees.

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Having him seated in a chair the doctor sent a servant of his to fetch the pandit. The pandit came and saw Ramdas snugly lolling on a chair. Ramdas now became a quiet listener to the talk in the Kashmiri tongue between the doctor and the pandit. His stay for months in their midst had given him so much insight into their language that he could make out the trend of their talk. There ensued a war of words between them. The pandit did not like to part with Ramdas. He went to the length of assuring the doctor that he would provide Ramdas with clothing and blankets. The scuffle went on for about half-an-hour and the doctor in the end came off triumphant. The pandit left the place grumbling and disappointed.

At dusk by the last motor-bus Ramcharandas also turned up. He had brought the woollen dress for himself and also for Ramdas. The same evening Ramdas met a relation of the doctor, who arranged to provide him with a long woollen cloak and an umbrella. God, when He wills to shower His favour on his children, does so unasked and in such profusion that they get dazed and bewildered.

On the following day the crowd of pilgrims moved onward and the hospital camp followed suit—so also Ramdas and Ramcharandas with two sturdy pandits, servants of the doctor, who kept him company. The doctor rode on horseback.

By evening they reached the second stage of their journey, Phelgaon. The hospital camp was fixed on a vast plain near the bank of the river. Now Phelgaon is a most captivating place—lofty mountains on one side, a dense forest of firs and tall poplars on the other, and the smooth running river in the plateau of the valley. The vast open space with the enchanting borders lent sublimity and a unique fascination to the place. The glorious landscapes of Kashmir have been attracting tourists from various parts of the world. The charm and

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beauty of the landscapes, it is said, compare favourably with the world-famous sights and views of Switzerland.

In Phelgaon, in the thick crowds of pilgrims, Ramdas discovered Balak Ram Paramahams. When he so unexpectedly met Ramdas his joy knew no bounds. Ramdas found him still a slave to ganja smoking. He asked Ramdas for a cloth, and he parted with the spare one he had. He later learnt that Balak Ram had not been permitted to proceed further up to Amarnath by the police as he ran amuck and began to assault the peaceful pilgrims, and the police drove him out of Srinagar to Rawalpindi.

When Ramdas returned to the camp he found that many new friends had joined the party, including some vakils and professors. Dr. Amarnath came to know that Ramdas had given away a cloth, and he took Ramdas roundly to task for what he considered a foolish act. He undertook the charge of Ramdas' spare clothes. Ramdas scarcely used the long gown, the gift of the doctor's relation. Particularly this cloak the doctor packed covertly in his kit. Whenever Ramdas put it on, a guard was kept on him so that he might not give it away.

At noon he met a white missionary who became very friendly with him. Ramdas spoke to him of God, Love and Christ. He was immensely pleased and proposed to arrange for a sermon by Ramdas in their church on his return from Amarnath.

(ii) Ramdas rapt in the vision

As far as Phelgaon the road was level. From Phelgaon commenced the uphill path. The winding path made the ascent easy, and Ramdas with the friends walked at a brisk pace and reached Chandanwadi long before sunset. The landscapes of Chandanwadi possessed their own unique charm. The

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scenes were most inspiring. Here the river rushed down-hill at a rapid speed. At Chandanwadi the pilgrims halted for a night. Ramdas was so well taken care of by the doctor that, at night, he would particularly see that Ramdas was covered with two blankets. The other friends also loved him with great zeal. But Ramcharandas did not get on amicably with the pandits and so he kept away from the tent and threw in his lot with the sadhus in the open air.

Next day the party moved onwards. Ramdas was furnished by the first pandit, with whom he had come as far as Mattan, with a pair of canvas shoes, which he put on for about thirty miles, but finding them an encumbrance threw them away. He was now going bare-footed. Except the woollen cap which he was wearing off and on, the woollen jacket and the bit of khaddar cloth, he had no other dress. He liked to have the body light so that he could freely run on the hills.

As Ramdas ascended higher and higher he viewed a most beautiful natural scenery that filled him with rapturous delight. The ground was now all along carpeted with short plants and grass, bearing multi-coloured blooms as though fresh blossoms were sprinkled and strewn all the way for a festive occasion.

The next stage of their halt was Vavjin. A few miles beyond Phelgaon there is a place calld Nilganga where the pilgrims consider it holy to have a bath in the river. The water of the river was very cold. Ramdas going up to the brink of the river, where a crowd of pilgrims had assembled for bath, divested himself of his clothing, and with a bare kaupin on jumped into the river near its bank and had three dips. When he came out of the water his body was benumbed and stiff with cold. The pandits who accompanied him rubbed his body briskly with a woollen napkin and dressed him again, and made him drink a cup of hot tea which they were

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carrying in a thermosflask. Onward ran Ramdas followed by the pandits, and by evening arrived at the plateau of Vavjin.

Vavjin, in other words, Vayu Jin, that is Jinnee of the hurricane, is a place where furious blasts of icy cold winds are blowing at all times, often accompanied by rain. The spot is therefore wet and chilly. Pilgrims with spare warm clothing suffered intensely from the cold here.

Here the first pandit escort invited Ramdas to his tent for dinner, where he met an elderly man, an Inspector of schools, in whose company Ramdas ascended a hill on the plateau. The Inspector left Ramdas half way up and climbed down, as the chill breezes were too much for him. Moreover, it began to rain. Ramdas and Ramcharandas scaled the summit of the hill and descended before dark.

Passing the night at Vavjin, the next day they prosecuted their march. About nine o'clock they reached a place called Sheshnag. The cold was now becoming increasingly rigorous. Sheshnag is a vast, circular, natural reservoir of water, a gigantic cavity in the mountains, resembling a tub with one of its sides open. The water was of dazzling purity with a bluish grey tint. Ramdas and the party approached the margin of the spherical lake and found the water icy cold.

Turning to Ramcharandas he said:

"Ramji, remove your clothing, let us have a bath in the lake." Ramcharandas shrank from the prospect.

"The water is extremely cold," he said; "do not let us bathe here."

"No, Ram, it is essential that we should have a bath in this lake. Ramdas will take his dips near the bank as he is not used to swimming, whereas you ought to take a jump into the water and have a good swim. You are young and a spirited youth. You have no cause to hesitate. Come along," urged

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Ramdas.

Reluctantly the lad doffed the snug and warm cloak that covered his body, while Ramdas also divested himself of his scanty garment. He first entered the water and when he came to a depth in which the water stood up to his chest, he asked Ramcharandas to take the leap, which he did, swimming for about five minutes before returning to the bank. Ramdas after three dips also regained his place. The pandits were ready to rub and dry his body with their coarse towels.

Then the party went forward and came to Panchatarni by evening. Panchatarni is a flat valley in the midst of high mountains covered with thick layers of silvery snow. The river here was flowing at a slow pace. The pilgrims pitched their tents near the bank of the river. It must be noted that in these higher regions the sun shone dimly through a thick grey mist, and the air was surcharged with a biting cold. The haze lent a weird charm to the view of the chequered verdure and the snow-capped mountains.

About five o'clock a young man of Peshawar, Shambunath, alighted from his horse. He was dressed after the European fashion. He came to the spot where Ramdas stood gazing on the snows of the hills, rapt in the vision. Ramdas could not resist giving vent to his feelings.

"What a wonderful spectacle; how sublime is this manifestation of God! He has assumed various forms, but this particular one unfolding before our sight is simply glorious. Look all round; everywhere it is He, in the snow, the mountain, the river and the green valley—"

Ramdas stopped. Thoughts melted away and words failed. For, the scene was simply indescribable! Shambunath listened with concentration to Ramdas' outburst and a change came over him. His face erstwhile pale and gloomy brightened

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and a smile played about it.

"Swamiji, I am blest by your darshan," cried out the young man, "I was sinking under dejection which I feared to be a precursor of illness. The sight of you and your exalting utterance have lifted me from depression. I now feel braced up and cheerful. I am fortunate in having met you."

Later, he introduced Ramdas to his mother, a very pious lady, and his other friends, who showered kindness and love on Ramdas.

(iii) A Woman in Distress—Amarnath Cave

Panchatarni is only four miles from the shrine of Amarnath. The pilgrims usually settle down here and go up for a few hours for the darshan of Amarnath and return to their tents in Panchatarni. Night passed and it was planned that the party in the doctor's tent should start on the short journey about nine o'clock the next morning, return by one o'clock and leave Panchatarni that very day and pass Vavjin the same night.

About eight o'clock an incident happened in the doctor's tent which needs to be chronicled here. The doctor and the pandit friends occupying the tent were accustomed to massage Ramdas' legs by turns. They took great pleasure in doing this service. When Ramdas was seated in the tent at Panchatarni, the doctor and another friend divided between themselves Ramdas' legs, and were busy massaging them. At this juncture, an old female pilgrim, emaciated and weak, came to the front of the tent and cried out in distress. Her whole frame was shivering with cold as she had only a thin cotton saree covering her body. She piteously appealed for some warm clothing. Her repeated supplications fell upon deaf ears. None in the tent would condescend to part with a single piece of

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woollen cloth for the suffering beggar woman. The friends had brought plenty of dress and covering to stand against the cold, and so Ramdas thought that they could help the poor woman in her hour of need.

When Ramdas suggested some assistance to the woman, they to a man declined to give it, offering the excuse that they could not spare anything. Ramdas was put in mind of the woollen gown which had been presented to him and was now in the keeping of the doctor. Ramdas requested the doctor to hand over the gown to the woman. Even this the whole party opposed.

"The gown is for your use, Swamiji,' said the doctor; "I cannot give it to the woman."

"Well, friends,' Ramdas then asked turning to the doctor, "why are you so fond of pressing Ramdas' legs? What do you get thereby?'

"We feel happy when we do so," replied the doctor.

"Ramdas permits you to do him this service, because it grants you joy, while you would not give him happiness by yielding to his will in the matter of presenting the gown to the woman whose need of it is far greater than that of Ramdas," said Ramdas.

Then Ramdas suddenly drawing up his legs challenged the friends by the remark:

'Ramdas denies you this happiness since you are not willing to give him delight by relieving the distress of the beggar woman."

This attitude of Ramdas produced the desired effect on the doctor and the friends. The doctor at once fetched the woollen cloak from the hiding place and threw it on Ramdas, and he in his turn immediately transferred it to the needy old woman.

"Now here, do as much massaging as you like," and

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Ramdas stretched out his folded legs. And they fell to the task.

Shortly after this they started for the darshan of Amarnath. A four-mile walk through a narrow winding path at the edge of a hill brought them to an open, uneven and rocky vale, the river running to its right and an immense cavity gaping out of the side of the mountain to the left. Ramdas missed Ramcharandas. He was lost in the vast and confused mass of pilgrims who were reckoned to be over thirteen thousand.

After bath in the river Ramdas made his way to the cave. The cave, a natural hollow in the mountains, is enormous in size with a wide open mouth. Already hundreds of pilgrims had assembled in it. The place where worship is offered has a Shiva linga made of snow. Ramdas could not gain a view of the murti as it was completely hidden beneath the presents of cloths, etc., thrown over it by the pilgrims. On the right and left of the Shiva linga are huge blocks of snow which represent Parvati and Ganesh. Ramdas has heard it said that Shiva's murti grows in size during the first fortnight of the month with the waxing of the moon and becomes smaller in dimension with the waning of it. Ramdas also saw a couple of white doves sporting on the rugged ceiling of the cave. Now hereby hangs a legend.

In the days of yore, when God Shiva and his consort Parvati resided in the cave, at the request of the latter the God narrated to her the Amarkatha, or the story relating to the secret of immortality. As God Shiva proceeded with the story, Parvati, overpowered by sleep, dozed away. At the same time a pair of doves lodged in the roof of the cave were eagerly listening to God Shiva's narration. In the place of Parvati the doves responded to the story by uttering the sound "hoo, hoo, hoo." Thereafter, it is said, the doves not only became immortal

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but also their species came to adopt the same cooing cry. It is said that the same two birds are still alive and are seen in the cave.

The pure and sanctified atmosphere, the glorious surroundings and sight of thousands of pilgrims, gave rise in him to waves of rapturous delight. He met at the cave Ramcharandas. When asked about his bath he said that he had already had one.

Bath and darshan over, the host of pilgrims retraced their steps to their camp in Panchatarni. The doctor and his party started on their downward journey. Before nightfall they fixed their tents at a low lying hillside beyond Vavjin. Here report was brought to the doctors that a sadhu had given up his body at Vavjin on account of the severity of the cold. This was the only casualty that occurred among the pilgrims.

Early next day they commenced again the march down the hills. The path was now, of course, a continuous incline, and Ramcharandas close at his heels ran down the slopes at break-neck speed, and reached Phelgaon long before the hospital camp arrived.

The missionary either could not locate Ramdas' whereabouts, since the camp was pitched at a different place this time, or he forgot all about Ramdas and his proposal regarding the sermon in his church, as he did not turn up. God's will!

By the ensuing evening, as they now proceeded in quick marches, the party reached Srinagar. Ramcharandas and Ramdas of course directed their steps straight to Janakinath's house.

A party consisting of almost all the members of Janakinath's household started on a trip to Chenar Bagh. They crossed the Dal lake by boat and came to Chenar Bagh. The place is full of gigantic chenar trees. The view one could have from this spot when facing the lake was grand. The distant bluish

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mountains, the vast sheet of the still water of the lake and the clear, open heavens above made up the enchanting picture. Ramdas ran, danced and skipped in the cool shade beneath the chenar trees for some time, and suddenly climbed up a slim and tall giant among them with Ramcharandas in close pursuit.

While Ramdas was going up the tree at incredible speed like a monkey, the members of the party gazed on the performance agape with amazement, not unmixed with a sense of curious delight, for they were quite unprepared for the exhibition of this aspect of his restless activity. When he reached the very summit of the tree, he shouted forth at the top of his voice, "Hari Om" three times, sending a thrill through the hearers.

Now he descended to witness the feats of asanas shown by Ramcharandas. During his absence from Ramdas he had learnt nearly thirty asanas. The presentation of the feats showed how pliable and yielding his body had become through practice. He could twist and bend it easily in so many ways. The party looked on his performance with great interest and joy. After some refreshments the party left the spot and by evening regained Janakinath's house.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

SRINAGAR

(i) Ramdas defies Ram

The prolonged stay of Ramdas in Kashmir was causing anxiety to the friends in India, who were deluging him with their communications urging him to leave the hills again for the plains. They were also sending wire upon wire. Janakinath and Amarnath were quite averse to his departure from Srinagar. They suggested that he should make his permanent residence in future in Kashmir and that they would arrange for his stay near Hari Parvat or Harvan. But he was becoming conscious of the pull down to the south, from the friends in Rawalpindi, United Provinces, Kathiawar, Bombay and the southern districts. When he talked of quitting Srinagar the devoted brothers would oppose the idea. With the best of motives they sometimes connived at suppressing the correspondence from the friends in India, but they had to abandon this subterfuge when they found that it was of no avail.

Now Gopalrao and his wife Girijabai, Saraswats of Kanara, related to mother Rukmabai, were in Srinagar at this time. They had information about Ramdas and were very desirous of seeing him. Gopalrao communicated with Amarnath Bakshi and expressed his longing to have Ramdas as his guest for some days. Amarnath concealed the contents of this letter from him, fearing that he would leave them on hearing of it.

Meanwhile, Janakinath proposed to take him for the darshan of a Kashmiri sadhu living in a solitary spot outside Srinagar, in the suburbs. The sadhu was said to have been observing a vow of silence for some years. He agreed at first

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to go with him, but half-way, Ram wanting him to turn back, he returned to the city in spite of pressure on the part of Janakinath and other friends. The same night Amarnath, feeling that he could not any longer withhold the news of the letter from Gopalrao, delivered the epistle to him. Ramdas now decided. "Janakinath," Ramdas said, "Ram's will is that Ramdas shall respond to the call from Gopalrao instead of going out of the way to see a silent sadhu, who is not eager to see him. So tomorrow morning he proceeds to Gandarbal, where Gopalrao appears to be living in a house-boat, and will spend some days in his company. It is his earnest desire and the love that he bears for Ramdas that have defeated your plan of a visit to the silent sadhu."

Janakinath, for whom separation from Ramdas was nothing short of a painful blow, was alarmed at the prospect. Similar were the feelings of Amarnath and Janakinath's two daughters, those models of purity, simplicity and devotion. But Ramdas had to obey the command of his Lord.

The following morning Ramdas stood up to depart for Gandarbal with Ramcharandas as his companion. But Janakinath stationed himself in the doorway and said:

"Swamiji, I shall see how you will leave my house. I obstruct your egress; you shall not go. I am your Ram. It is Ram's will that you shall not leave me."

Ramdas was now fired with a grim determination. He was not in a mood to brook any hindrance, however great. He spoke, and his words rang out in a measured and stern tone.

"Janakinath, Ramdas must go. He cannot be foiled. Even if Ram Himself were to stand in his way he would defy him and go."

These words and the manner of their utterance made Janakinath understand that Ramdas was not to be trifled with.

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He cleared out of the way and agreed to his departure. He would have Ramdas go by tonga, but the distance being only eleven miles Ramdas preferred to walk. After breakfasting on milk and fruits, he took leave of Janakinath and his family, accompanied by Ramcharandas.

About eleven o'clock in the morning, they arrived on the banks of the Sindhu river, where they found a number of house-boats. After a few minutes' search Ramcharandas discovered the particular house-boat occupied by Gopalrao.

Gopalrao and his wife welcomed Ramdas with excessive joy. The house-boat, a barge with a neat, beautifully furnished dwelling place, consisted of six cabins and a small terrace over the front cabin. There were the drawing room, the dining room, two bedrooms, a store-room and a bath. Artistic curtains adorned the windows, and carpets covered the floor. The boat was lit with electric lights. It was moored in a position on the river from where a charming view of the surrounding landscape could be had. The Sindhu river, noted for its blue water of crystalline purity, was meandering slowly along.

After a week's stay at this place Gopalrao arranged to have the house-boat moved to Gagribal, at the foot of Sri Shankaracharya hill, in the Dal lake. Gopalrao and Girijabai were overflowing in their love and kindness to Ramdas. They were an ideal couple, fond of each other like a pair of doves, unsophisticated, innocent and playful like children.

When the house-boat was being moved towards the Dal lake by the sturdy Muslim boatmen, Ramdas had an opportunity to have a quiet talk with Ramcharandas.

"Ram," Ramdas said, "you must prepare yourself to part from Ramdas. He has shortly to leave for the plains and he will not have you go down with him leaving this blessed country. You may remain in Kashmir for some years. It is a

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suitable place for your sadhanas. When you are next seen by Ramdas you must present a visage illumined with the glow of Self-realization and eyes filled with the vision of the Infinite. Have full trust in God who is in your heart, and he will look to all your conveniences and comforts during your residence in these cold regions."

Once more the boy, who had attached himself to Ramdas, evinced signs of perturbation at the idea of separation. He grumbled and fretted over it. Ramdas used all his powers of persuasion to convince him of the necessity for carrying out his suggestion, as it would tend ultimately to his own benefit. At last he agreed to follow Ramdas' advice.

A word here for Ramcharandas would be appropriate. After Ramdas left him in Kashmir, he had one communication from him, from Rishikesh, some months later, addressed to Anandashram, Kasaragod. From that time up to date, Ramdas has had no news from him. Ramdas remembers the last advice he gave him; and this was:—"You should not come to see Ramdas again, until you are radiant with the knowledge and bliss of Brahman. But it is doubtful", Ramdas added, "if you would feel the need of meeting him at all, when you have attained that supremely blessed state." Whatever it be, the sweet memory of his fellowship and of the various acts of loving service he did for Ramdas in his wandering life, will ever remain fresh in his mind. Whatever be the so-called weaknesses he displayed, Ramdas recognised in him a sadhaka of a rare, dauntless spirit, at times riding on the very crest of a wave of burning renunciation, and entirely free from the ego-obsession. His main anchor of belief was, that devoted service of the Guru and of saints is the *sine qua non* of a spiritual life.

A couple of days' halt in front of a hospital in the Jhelum

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river, and the house-boat was finally moved into the lake and anchored at Gagribal.

(ii) Behold God's majesty in all things

A few days after their arrival at Gagribal, Ramcharandas departed to Anantnag. A new guest also joined them, a Sikh barrister who took his lodgings in the boat.

Gopalrao was the Vice-Principal of the Khalsa College in Amritsar. He had come to Kashmir on a pleasure-trip during the holidays. He and his wife had also visited Amarnath cave, a day or two in advance of the usual day of pilgrimage. So Ramdas had no occasion to meet them when he went up to the cave. Gopalrao was a generous-hearted and noble-minded soul. His friends were mostly Sikhs and his leanings were towards Sikhism. He held in high veneration the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, and had studied Gurumukhi in order to be in direct touch with his teachings. He would, every night before retiring to sleep, make it a rule to go through Sukhmani, a work by Guru Arjun Dev, which is very popular among the Sikhs. Guru Nanak was a great believer in the power of God's Name. In fact, the only discipline which he prescribed for the control of mind and for spiritual meditation is the singing of God's Name and His glories.

One day Gopalrao spoke of a Sikh saint who was to visit Srinagar and whom he regarded as a Guru or spiritual preceptor, and said that he greatly wished that Ramdas should be presented to him. A few days after they shifted to Gagribal, the saint arrived, and Ramdas had the opportunity of meeting him along with his friends in a quiet spot on a small piece of green headland in the middle of the Dal lake. Bhai Vir Singh, popularly known as Pitaji among his disciples and admirers, was a childlike devotee. He took a great liking

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for Ramdas. They had a short talk on the teachings of saints, bhakti and the power of God's Name.

Ramdas would utilize the early mornings to climb up Sri Shankaracharya hill and lose himself in the contemplation of God. The enchanting vision of the landscape, lakes and mountains from the hill top captivated him. During one of his wanderings on the hill he came upon a cave. In one of his trips uphill Gopalrao and his wife also accompanied him. Ramdas was given to ascending it by direct paths. So the friends, when they followed him upon the hill, had a most trying time of it as he was running up like a squirrel.

One day a young Gujarati came to the house-boat in search of Ramdas. He was the Secretary to the Yuvaraja, the eldest son of the Thakore Saheb of Limbdi. The father had wired his son to see Ramdas. The son was staying in Srinagar at the time. His motor-car carried Ramdas to the Yuvaraja's house-boat moored in the Jhelum river in front of the late Maharaja's palace. The Yuvaraja's time was fully crowded with engagements as he confessed, and so Ramdas had an interview with him for about five minutes, when they had only a formal talk about health, etc.

About this time Ramdas met K. Sadashivarao, Director of Army Audit, who had also come to Kashmir with his family on a pleasure excursion. He with his wife and two daughters came on a visit to the house-boat. Soon after this Durgadas Nagarkatte invited to his bungalow Sadashivarao with his family, Gopalrao and his wife and Ramdas. They had a happy time of it together for a couple of days.

One morning Ramdas discovered Durgadas and Gopalrao, seated under the shade of a chenar tree in front of the bungalow, discussing the genuineness and value of some precious stones which Gopalrao had recently purchased. Ramdas approached

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them. Durgadas handed to Ramdas an opal and exclaimed: "What a beautiful stone!"

Ramdas at once bent down and picked up a stone from the ground and holding it up said: "Why can you not see the same beauty in this stone and majesty in the yonder mountain? Everything is God's creation, everything is displaying beauty. Why speak only of that particular stone?" They smiled and kept silent.

Kabir and Uddhav were as loving and kind as ever.

At this time Ramdas, in the company of Gopalrao, his wife and a guide, went on a visit to the famous silk factory of Srinagar. The Mohammedan manager of the factory, who was very kind and obliging, took the party round the works. He explained to them the various processes through which the raw silk passed before the finished product, in the shape of twisted hanks of glossy yarn, could be obtained. When he was dilating upon the boiling of the silk larva by steam, in front of the contrivance intended for it, he could not help remarking with a tinge of regret: "I am sorry, but I have the ill-luck to become the means of destroying every day thousands of innocent worms." After the visit they returned to the residence of Durgadas.

Before the party broke up, Sadashivarao desired that Ramdas should pay him a visit at Rawalpindi where he was posted, if Ramdas happened to go down to the plains through that city. Ramdas, Gopalrao and Girijabai returned to the house-boat.

Ramdas' daily wanderings on the Shankaracharya hill drew him often to the cave on it. It appeared to be exerting on him a strange fascination. In the moon-lit nights Gopalrao would take him and Girijabai for boating on the lake. The

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glory of those nights in the midst of the bewitching charms of Kashmir does not lend itself to description. Sometimes they would also have baths in the cool waters of the lake.

Once the party visited the famous gardens of Kashmir in a special gondola engaged for the purpose. On their return trip, when the boat was midway on the lake, a storm burst and as a result the boat swayed most ominously. The inmates were frightened but they saw with unfeigned surprise Ramdas capering with great glee. However, the storm subsided and the party regained the house-boat without any mishap.

Whenever there was a shortage of a hand in a game of bridge, Gopalrao would have Ramdas fill the vacancy. They also played a game called Bolshevik and Ramdas invariably turned out to be a rabid and reckless Bolshevik in the game.

One day Girijabai received a wire from her father at Honavar that her mother was seriously ill. The tidings upset her and she became wistful and gloomy. That evening when Ramdas was sitting alone on the terrace of the boat, Girijabai rushed up to where he was, and with folded hands revealed her gnawing anxiety about her mother.

"Ramdas," she pleaded, "if you would give me an assurance that my mother is all right by now, and that I would receive a wire to that effect tomorrow I should be free from a load of unbearable misery."

"Trust God, mother, and everything will be all right," Ramdas replied.

These heartening words immediately dispelled her sorrow and she became again the same lively and bright-faced girl that she was. Her pure and simple faith brought about the fruition of her wish. On the following day she got a wire from her father to say that her mother was past danger.

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(iii) Illumination in the Cave

Gopalrao's vacation was now coming to a close. He proposed to take Ramdas with him to Amritsar. He engaged a special motor-car for the journey to Rawalpindi, but Ramdas' attraction for the cave on the hill did not permit him to accompany him. God willed that he should live in the cave for some days. He disclosed this fact to Gopalrao, who was greatly disappointed at the news, but had to submit to the inevitable. His deep concern for Ramdas induced him to leave word with Bhai Vir Singh, the Sikh saint, to have a watchful interest in Ramdas. He left Srinagar with his wife and the same evening Ramdas occupied the cave.

The interior of the cave was spacious although the entrance was narrow. Since the cave had been frequented by goats that grazed on the hill, the place inside was extremely dirty with their droppings and urine. There was a small Chenar tree at the mouth of the cave and a flat slab of stone at its base.

Ramdas then possessed only one thin ochre-coloured, plain Kashmir shawl presented by Gopalrao, and nothing else. The floor in the cave was of two levels. As you enter you come to the lower ground, at the end of which is a raised platform reaching the back hollow wall of the cave. The ground and the pedestal were rugged and sharp bits of gravel lay thickly scattered on them. Even during the day semi-darkness prevailed in the cave. As the sun was about to set, Bhai Vir Singh came hastening up the hill to where Ramdas was and said:

"I have heard that you are going to stay in this cave. You may command me to supply you with whatever you want."

"Ramdas wants nothing," was Ramdas' reply.

"No, that will not do; I will arrange to provide you with food, blankets and rugs," he exclaimed.

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"Ramdas wants to remain here for some days without food and comforts. So please don't trouble yourself," Ramdas put in.

"I cannot agree with you there. You must permit me to feed and look after you. I will consider it as no small privilege. I will not allow you to starve. Tell me what you would have. Don't think that you can put me off so lightly," he said.

In fact Ramdas wished to live in that solitary spot for some days, undisturbed with the food and drink questions. But the saint was obdurate and Ramdas had to yield and stipulate:

"Well, maharaj, you may provide him at midday with a small quantity of boiled rice mixed with milk; that is all."

"That is not all," he answered quickly, "what about evening? I would have you take at least some fruit and milk."

Ramdas became helpless in the hands of one who was determined to feed him. The saint left. When darkness set in Ramdas entered the cave and took up his position on the raised ground, using a part of the thin shawl for spreading on the floor, and lay down flat on the rough gravel.

About ten o'clock a stout and fair-looking boy-servant of the saint came, lantern in hand, carrying a mat of stout reeds and some blankets. Ramdas spread the mat at the place where he lay down, and having a blanket folded up for a pillow he returned the surplus blankets and bade good-night to the lad.

The cave was pitch-dark in the night. He stretched himself on the mat at full length and covered his body with his shawl. He did not feel much cold as the cave was warm within. The whole night he was awake. After midnight he heard beside him a rustling noise and squeaks as of rats which did not in any way molest him.

The night passed and the day dawned. He went out and sat on the slab of stone at the foot of the Chenar tree and drank

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in the picturesque scenes of the lake, mountains and growth of green foliage. As noon approached he retired into the cave.

Now an old Muslim paid him a visit. He expressed his surprise at seeing Ramdas dwelling in the cave and added:

"Are you aware that there are two serpents in this cave? Many goats that strayed into this cave have fallen victims to their poisonous fangs. You see a hole just a few inches from the place where you rest your head. It is their home. Did you not have any trouble from them? How long have you been in this place?"

"Ramdas has been staying here since last evening," Ramdas replied. "In the night, except that he heard the squeak of rats and a rustling noise caused by them, he had no other disturbance."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with eyes wide open and his bearded head shaking, "they are the serpents, not rats as you suppose. They produce a cry similar to that of rats. I have not visited the cave for a long time and was under the impression that the serpents might have left the place. Now I know they are still there. Be warned. Leave this dreadful place at once. Somehow, they spared you last night; you cannot be sure of the future."

"Ramdas has no fear. He stops in this cave under the protection of God and by His command. So he would continue to reside here," Ramdas replied.

The old man nodded his head again with grave and doubtful looks. The talk turning into other channels, he spoke of a Muslim sadhu who had been living in the cave for thirty years and this was twenty years ago. Giving Ramdas a second warning the kind-hearted old man left.

The boy-servant of Bhai Vir Singh brought food and milk at midday and in the evening regularly. Sometimes, Ramdas

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would be sitting on the hill on a peak lower than that of the temple, absorbed in blissful abstraction, and would forget to go down to the cave at meal time. But the faithful boy would quietly search for Ramdas with the food basket in hand and when he found Ramdas feed him wherever he might be sitting.

Bhai Vir Singh, Janakinath, Shambunath and several Sikh friends would pay him visits during the day and furnish him with pots for water and charcoal, kangdi, matches, etc., to keep a fire against cold, but Ramdas never used these materials. Shambunath, whom Ramdas had met at Panchatarni, desired to have him for a few days at his house on his leaving the cave.

Ramdas lived in the cave for a week, during which time he never bathed, drank or used water. Water could be had only from the lake which was at the foot of the hill, fairly three furlongs down from the cave. He never descended the hill in those days.

On the night of the seventh day he had a strange experience. It might be past midnight. The interior of the cave was as usual utterly dark. Suddenly a brilliant, bluish light lit up the entire cave. He seemed to be absorbed in that light, which lasted only for a few seconds, and then it gradually disappeared throwing the cave again into depths of darkness.

On the eighth day, early morning, i.e., the day following the vision of light, he left the cave and presented himself at the kuti of saint Bhai Vir Singh, who welcomed him with open arms.

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CHAPTER XXXIX

SRINAGAR—RAWALPINDI—AMRITSAR

(i) A perilous venture

From Bhai Vir Singh's kuti Ramdas was escorted by Shambunath to his house in Amirakadal, in the main bazaar of Srinagar. Shambunath's father, mother and other relations treated him with great kindness and love. He stopped with them for about a fortnight. In the course of his stay he expressed to Shambunath that God willed that he should climb up the highest mountain in the range at the front of the cave of Sri Shankaracharya hill. The idea of hill-climbing appealed to Shambunath's imagination. He also proposed to accompany Ramdas in the trip.

So one early morning, they started on the adventure. Shambunath armed himself with a thermos-flask filled with tea and also a small bag containing biscuits, bread, butter and fruits. As far as the foot of the hill they travelled by motor-car. Now they commenced the ascent. They took a path along the greatest incline and ascended higher and higher keeping in view the peak they had to reach. From the ground level the summit did not appear to be of very great height but now, as they went up, they discovered that the summit seemed to be as high up as ever. Seven hills, one after another, were passed and at last they came to the bottom of the peak they had ultimately to reach.

Up to the end of the fourth hill they walked on a rough beaten path but further on there was no track. They had to make their way through thickets and gorges and over rugged rocks. Except a couple of jackals, who took to flight at the

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sight of them, they met no other animals. Now the highest peak to be climbed had to be scaled either spirally, an easier method, or right up vertically. Ramdas adopted the latter course. He scrambled up using the dense growth of brown grass as hand-hold, followed by Shambunath. When they went about half-way up the slope, Ramdas came upon a small, smooth rock to which he lifted himself and perching on it saw the friend behind struggling to keep pace with him, his face flushed with excitement. A look down into the valley below discovered a rare and marvellous scene. From that dizzy height a wide and terribly deep chasm was yawning at their feet. As Shambunath neared, Ramdas could not help exclaiming:

"Ram, look below, what a magnificent scene!" When Shambunath turned his head to see for a moment he cried out helplessly: "Swamiji, I am gone, hold on—hold, I am slipping," and he stretched forth this arms which Ramdas immediately grasped with both hands, and with a super-human strength pulled him up bodily on to the rock on which he was sitting. Shambunath now rested with eyes closed for about five minutes before he recovered from the faintness.

"Swamiji," he then said, "please don't ask me to look down again. A glimpse of the awe-inspiring and enormous depths turned me giddy, and but for you I should have rolled down the mountain to my sure destruction."

They ascended higher still and steadily progressed through the tall grass that grew luxuriantly on the mountain, and at last arrived at the summit. The time was now about three o'clock in the afternoon. They sat down on the grass and leisurely took a view of Kashmir from the tremendous height. What Ramdas saw from there beggars description. It was the vision

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of the infinite expanse of space, the dim outlines of mountains looming in the distance and the extensive valley of Kashmir scintillating with its innumerable glassy lakes, relieved by vast areas of green verdure and vegetation.

Shambunath was cheerful and lively although tired. He opened the screw cap of the thermos and the bag of eatables, and they both did hearty justice to the hard-earned tiffin. They rested for about half-an-hour. Shambunath now suggested that they should make haste for their return journey since they had to reach down before dark. It was proposed that they should descend by a different way, especially by a slope which looked tempting, as it appeared to be one which could take them to the bottom easily and in a short time.

They then quickly descended the incline and came to the brink of a precipice which shut off their further progress downwards. They turned to another adjoining slope of the mountain and climbed down only to meet with a similar precipice. They turned to a third direction where they helped themselves down by holding on to the branches of trees that grew densely. Still their path was cut off by yet another vertical cliff. Here Ramdas, seeing some roots projecting out on the wall of the cliff, attempted to go down by their aid, when Shambunath intervened and said:

"Swamiji, I cannot follow you that way. Do give up the path."

Ramdas had to abandon the attempt. By this time, the evening was fast approaching beckoning the night, clothed in her dark mantle. Ramdas and the friend rested for some minutes beneath the trees.

"Swamiji, suppose we can't find the way down the hill, what are we to do?" questioned Shambunath.

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"Why, of course, we shall stop here for the night,"-replied Ramdas.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "I cannot do that in this horrible place. I am afraid of wild animals. It is time for them to come out of their lairs. Swamiji, let us try to find out the old way by which we came up."

But the way by which they had ascended was also lost. They were caught in the perplexing undulations of the vast chain of mountains. They roamed up and down in search of the old path for over half-an-hour but without success; and all the while, Shambunath was growing excited and anxious. At last they found themselves on the rough beaten path. When he saw it Shambunath's joy knew no bounds. With uncontrollable delight he leapt and danced, and burst out saying:

"Swamiji, you are indeed my God. You have brought me to the path. Let us hurry up."

Now Shambunath raced down the path like a horse at full gallop. He took perilous jumps on the way. He was reckless and wild. Ramdas ran close behind him. The sun had set. Darkness was steadily encroaching upon the twilight. When they neared the base of the mountains they swerved to their left and came upon some old ruins, where they rested for five minutes and then went down to the road near a famous spring of Kashmir called Chashma Shahi. They proceeded to the spring and drank their fill. The water of this spring is reputed to possess marvellous medicinal and healing properties. Rich people and invalids arrange to have this water for drinking purposes.

Now they retraced their steps to the city. Half-way they met Shambunath's motor-car which was coming to fetch them. They jumped into it and by half-past-seven reached Shambunath's residence.

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(ii) God's will be done

Another day Ramdas visited Achabal, one of the most frequented beauty spots of Kashmir, noted for its small but finely cultured garden and spring. He was accompanied by Shambunath and his father. When they were about to leave the garden, Ramdas met a sannyasi belonging to Sri Ramakrishna Mission and had a few minutes' talk with him.

Ramdas had also a pleasure trip arranged by Shambunath by boat at the far end of the Jhelum river. Besides Ramdas and a Sikh merchant, there were in the boat a German, an Agent for light machinery, and his two young, lively daughters. The German was making a new experiment in the working of a small motor-engine fixed to the boat. The boat now raced on the water at a brisk speed. The girls were in great glee. They giggled and laughed. The German conceived an affection for Ramdas. He said that he held Indian yogis in high regard. He talked freely with Ramdas on all matters. They went through ten miles on the river and had a halt at a cool spot for an hour where they enjoyed a pleasant picnic and a bath in the river. At parting on their return, the German friend expressed a desire to see Ramdas again in Bombay where he would be going shortly, if ever Ramdas visited the city in the near future. He handed to Ramdas his card containing his Bombay address which Ramdas preserved.

From Shambunath's house Ramdas, at the request of Durgadas, shifted to his spacious residence and stayed with him again for about a week. Now Ramdas had many a talk with Durgadas. Ramdas found him a learned and well-informed man. He possessed a clear head and a vast store of knowledge. He could talk on every conceivable subject. To converse with him generally was to enjoy an intellectual feast. He spoke on philosophy and religion with as much ease as he did on other

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topics. He was a great admirer of Kabir and his works. One day he read out original poems of Kabir treating of the highest philosophy, and Durgadas, who was a master in Hindi, expounded them to Ramdas. He explained the meaning, entering into the spirit of the sublime teachings.

One afternoon, in the society of his son-in-law, Bhavanishankerrao who had newly come from Bombay with his daughter, Ramdas had a drive in his motor-car to Verinag, a place about fifty miles from Srinagar. Verinag, like other beauty spots in Kashmir, offered a very charming view. It was a solitary spot over the hills fully shaded with trees and watered with numerous springs. At two spots Ramdas saw natural springs oozing out of the ground like fountains. The party remained here for an hour or two and returned to Srinagar before evening.

Again another day, by motor-car, these friends took Ramdas to Mattan for visiting the narrow cave on the hills.

Bhavanishankerrao was to start for Bombay as he had come to Kashmir during his summer vacation which was coming to a close. Ramdas proposed to accompany him. But Durgadas, out of his great love, intervened. He appealed to Ramdas to remain with him for some time more. His two children, Uddhav and Kabir, also joined him. But Ramdas was determined. He was to leave on the morrow. Seats for two were arranged in a motor-bus running to Rawalpindi. In the morning on the day fixed for departure, a message came by telephone to say that the seats booked were otherwise filled up and that there were no spare seats in other buses also for the day. Now, Bhavanishanker, who had to be present in Bombay on a particular date to attend his examination, was greatly upset by the news. For, he could reach Bombay in time only if he started on the day fixed. Now Durgadas coming to

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Ramdas said:

"Ramdas, it is Ram's will that you should not go. You must stay with me for at least a month more. So He has upset your plan of departure. We shall find a seat somehow for Bhavanishanker, but for you there would be no seat available which means that you are to stay behind."

"Ram's will be done," Ramdas simply replied.

In five minutes, another telephone message came to the effect that two seats were arranged in another bus.

"I must confess that your Ram is wonderful," Durgadas exclaimed.

"When He wills, nothing can stand in His way of fulfilling His object. His will is supreme," Ramdas said.

Ramdas therefore took leave of the loving household and seated himself by the side of Bhavanishankerrao, in a bus, which tore along the mountain path to Rawalpindi.

(iii) Association makes character

For the night they made a halt at Domel in the travellers' bungalow, and continued their journey next morning. All the way Ramdas enjoyed the lavish splendour of entrancing landscapes, the sound of the waterfalls and the pure springs of crystalline water. Long before sunset they reached Rawalpindi. Jewandas, the friend who had met Ramdas on his journey to Jwalajee and had treated him with such great kindness, was informed by wire of Ramdas' coming. But he could not in spite of his efforts, meet Ramdas at the motor-stand. So taking leave of Bhavanishankerrao, who was to start by the evening train for Bombay, Ramdas made enquiries for the house of Jewandas, whose address he knew, and presented himself at the door of his small dwelling. Jewandas' wife, as soon as she saw Ramdas, invited him with great joy to their house and, making him sit on a cot, fell to pressing his legs. Soon after

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this Jewandas arrived. The joy of the blessed pair to have Ramdas with them knew no bounds. Their little son was also greatly delighted.

Devout mothers of the neighbourhood poured in to see him in large numbers morning and evening and Jewandas' small house became crowded with visitors. In the evening he would be taken by the friends to a garden, away from the town precincts, where he would talk to them on devotion and the greatness of God's Name. Once when he was on his way to the garden with a dozen friends, a passerby on the road, observing Ramdas clad in ochre-coloured cloth and in the company of householders, struck a note of warning:

"Beware, don't teach them (referring to the friends) that the world is an illusion or you will lead them astray."

The cautious friend spoke as he walked off.

For Ramdas the world was no longer an illusion. He had come to look upon it as God's own expression in form and movement. For him the world stood revealed as a gigantic image of God teeming with divine life.

Ramdas spent a week in Rawalpindi during which he enjoyed a couple of days in the society of K. Sadashivarao and his family.

The next place to which he travelled was Amritsar where Gopalrao, who was given intimation beforehand, came to receive him at the station. His wife, Girijabai, was away at her mother's. He was alone with a man-servant at his house in the spacious compound of the Khalsa College.

Khalsa College is an institution mainly intended for the education of Sikhs. It consists of an imposing pile of buildings. There are hostels, vast structures for accommodating a thousand students. All the professors and teachers are also provided with residential quarters within the extensive grounds of the

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college which can be termed a colony, having also a Post Office attached to it.

A special class for all boys is held every morning for imparting spiritual instructions, when they are made to sing prayers and listen to the reading and exposition of Granth Saheb, the Scripture of the Sikhs. There is a tank of pure flowing water in which the boys perform their morning ablutions.

Through the introduction of Gopalrao, Ramdas became acquainted with a few professors and teachers of the college who paid him frequent visits and invited him to dinner at their houses. All of them were Sikhs. The Sikhs are a noble, industrious and kindly people. In the mornings and evenings Gopalrao would take Ramdas on his motor-cycle to the city, to visit saint Bhai Vir Singh who had now returned to Amritsar from Kashmir. He was all kindness and love. In his house Ramdas met also an old saint, Vaddasantji who became in course of time quite enamoured of Ramdas. He would at three in the morning daily come to Gopalrao's from a long distance to see Ramdas. He would embrace Ramdas and sit beside him with his hands clasped round Ramdas' shoulders and would say:

"I am coming to inhale the sweet fragrance which you radiate. To be with you fills me with a blissful intoxication." On one occasion Ramdas was sitting with the saints and a few devotees in Bhai Vir Singh's worship room upstairs where the holy book Granth Saheb was being read by turns by the devotees. Now a man at the entrance downstairs sent a request to be admitted into the satsung. A consultation took place between Bhai Vir Singh and Vaddasantji, and they came to the decision that the man should not be admitted since he would create a disturbance, not being a pure-hearted man. Here

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Ramdas intervened and pleaded on behalf of the eager devotee.

"If you consider him impure," Ramdas urged, "there is all the more reason that he should be admitted into your society. Satsung is the most potent power for purifying the heart of any one who comes under its influence. Do not deny the man this privilege since he seeks it of his own accord." The saints at first refused to take Ramdas' suggestion, but had to yield at last and the man was permitted to enter the room and sit beside them. The man stayed for a few minutes and then left. Saint Bhai Vir Singh then narrated a curious bit of his own experience to show how the society and influence of an evil-minded man produced disastrous results.

"Once a woman came to me," he went on, "in a distressed condition. She said that she had been of late subjected to attacks of splitting headache and wanted some remedy. When asked how the complaint started, she said that she was having it since she saw a wandering sadhu from whom she got the upadesh of a mantram. Ever since then, whenever she repeated the mantram, she would feel excruciating pains in the head. When I suggested to her to give up the repetition of the mantram she refused to do so, as she looked upon the sadhu as her guru. I prescribed abandoning the mantram as the only remedy but not agreeing with my suggestion she left. In a few days she came again and her condition was much worse than before. She was finding the pains quite unbearable. When again I asked her to stop the mantram, she replied that she tried to do so, but could not as the mantram appeared to have taken possession of her. Then I suggested to her, as the only course for averting its influence, to express in strong language her repugnance for the sadhu and a resolve not to have anything to do with his mantram. She refused point-blank to follow this advice as she held the sadhu in great reverence. She again

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left.

"After a week she turned up for the third time. She was quite cheerful and free from the racking ailment. She confessed that during the previous week the torments of the headache grew so unbearable that she was obliged to follow my advice and make a firm resolution not to utter the mantram, and this resolution she made after abusing the sadhu and holding him up as a loathsome creature. Immediately afterwards, she added, the headache ceased and with it the influence of the mantram. Ever since then she was feeling her old self again. So I consider there is no greater evil in life than association with a man whose heart is filled with bestial passions. Such a man easily communicates his nature to impressionable people who are of an emotional and weak temperament. And by the same rule, no society is so beneficial for our elevation and peace as that of a man of a noble character and pure heart."

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CHAPTER XL

AMRITSAR—CHHATTARPUR

(i) The Golden Temple of the Sikhs

One evening Gopalrao took Ramdas out on a visit to the celebrated Golden temple of the Sikhs which is their main Gurudwara. It is situated in the middle of a big tank with an overbridge on one side that leads up to the temple from the main land. The tank has all its four banks artistically covered with glazed and varied-coloured, square marble slabs. The visitors walked round the tank on this marble floor before entering the temple across the bridge. Anybody, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, has access to the temple. The only restrictions to be observed are—removal of shoes by the visitor who should have also clean feet and his headgear on. At the entrance to the tank two water taps are provided for washing the feet, and a man is appointed to be in charge of the shoes left over there.

Now the temple. It is a beautiful structure with small minarets at the corners of its roof and a dome at its centre. The entire temple except the floor is covered with gold sheets. The roof, the domes, and the walls are all of gold. When you enter the main hall through the verandah that runs along the four sides, you discover a huge book, the Granth Saheb, poised upon a stand covered with fine silk cloth and decorated with flowers and garlands. This place is the main prayer hall where the best singers congregate in front of the Sacred Book to perform kirtan to the accompaniment of musical instruments. There is also an upper gallery, as in a theatre, where you go up by a flight of stairs. Here the visitors sit listening to the

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music from the hall below. The kirtan goes on from three in the morning to ten or twelve o'clock in the night. Thousands of people, chiefly Sikhs, daily pay visits to this sacred shrine. During the first visit Ramdas remained in the temple only for a short time. He came again with Gopalrao at three in the morning and stayed till daybreak on the gallery upstairs. The music that wafted up to him from the hall was most charming. In front of the temple beyond the tank is the seat of one of the ten famous gurus of the Sikhs.

The Sikhs are proud of recounting the fierce battles their ancestors waged to preserve the temple from desecration at the hands of Mohammedan invaders. Much precious Sikh blood had freely flowed into the tank and on its borders in guarding the sanctuary. The Sikhs, even to the present day, are a martial race endowed with indomitable grit and valour. The warlike spirit was infused into them by one of their greatest gurus, Guru Govind Singh, who was himself an intrepid soldier and, at the same time, their religious head. He trained his followers and formed an army for protecting their religious faith and shrines from the attacks of foreign aggressors, especially the Mohammedans. The distinctive marks of a Sikh are the beard and the uncut hair which is tied up in a knot at the crown of the head which is invariably covered with a bulky pheta or turban. They have an iron wire bangle on one of their wrists and a kirpani or short dagger hanging by the side. They are quiet and kind in disposition. While they look upon Guru Nanak with the highest veneration, they recognize also the greatness of saints and incarnations of other religions.

Guru Nanak, as his life shows, was a wonderful personality. He is said to have performed many miracles during his time. The oft-quoted wonder that he wrought was the

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turning round Mecca. It is stated that when he was in Mecca in his itinerant life he happened to lie down with his legs turned towards the sacred shrine of the Muslims at Mecca. The Muslims holding that Guru Nanak was treating their holy temple with disrespect moved his legs round to a different posture and Mecca itself whirled round with this act. The Sikhs do not believe in caste distinctions and idol worship, prevalent among other Hindus. Their women are cultured and are free from the antiquated and borrowed customs of purdah, and also from the unwholesome modernism of the present day. The Sikhs have their names ending always with epithet 'Singh' which means lion. Verily, they are as noble, fearless and powerful a people as the kings of the jungle. The splendid heroism exhibited by Akalis is recent history.

In all, Ramdas remained in Amritsar for a fortnight, and then left the city for Jhansi.

(ii) The secret of Ramnam

As usual, at Jhansi, Ramdas stopped in the Ram-mandir into which he was welcomed with open arms by the Pandaji. Ramkinkar, Mahadev Prasad and other friends were as loving in their attentions as ever. Here, Ramchandra Gupta with a new friend, Ganesh Prasad, came down from Allahabad to see Ramdas.

An invitation from Mahoba drew Ramdas to that place. He again lived for ten days in the cave on Gohkar Parvat. Jagannath and other friends provided him with food. One afternoon a young friend came to see Ramdas. He had some wounds on his forehead and knees. He told the story relating to the injuries:

"Maharaj, last evening, I was coming to see you. When I reached half-way to this place darkness overtook me. In the

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dim light I saw right on the path a huge leopard sitting on its haunches staring viciously at me. I was so frightened that I gave forth a shriek, and turning back fled from the place pell-mell. In the darkness I stumbled over the stones and fell down several times. However, I got clear of the grasp of the wild beast and reached home. The injuries that you behold on me were caused by my falls during that flight for very life."

From Mahoba, in response to a call, Ramdas proceeded to Chhattarpur, where he halted in the Krishna temple. Bhavani Prasad overwhelmed him with kindness and hospitality. Here Ramdas learnt that Swami Nirbhayanandji and his spouse resided at the time in Navagaon. Ramdas went to that village for their darshan. He arrived at their residence one evening by motor-bus. The blessed pair was overjoyed to see Ramdas, but his halt with them proved short-lived, for about seven o'clock Bhavani Prasad and his devout wife turned up suddenly in a motor-car. They urged Ramdas to return with them to Chhattarpur as the Maharaja of the State was anxious to see him. So he was back at Chhattarpur that very night.

Early next morning, Gulab Rai, son of Bhavani Prasad, secretary to the Maharaja, escorted Ramdas to the palace of the Maharaja. He was a decrepit old man, weak and emaciated. Ramdas took his seat beside him.

"I have been repeating Ramnam for over thirty years," he said, "but still my mind is as restless as ever. How then could that Name be said to possess the power of quelling the tumult of the desire-ridden mind?"

"Peace can be attained," Ramdas replied, "by the japa of Ramnam only when you do so in a spirit of nishkama, i.e., with the sole desire for liberation and peace and without longing for worldly things. God grants our prayer when we appeal to Him with an earnest fervour of the heart only for pure devotion

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to His holy feet and for nothing else. So the secret of Ram-nam is in the taking of it for realizing the goal of life which is immortality or union with God."

"You are perfectly right. It is very hard to get nishkama bhakti," he observed, and changing the course of conversation said: "I have got a retainer of mine seriously ill from a gun-shot. He was one of the party who went for hunting and by oversight on the part of one of the party, he was shot in the thigh. His condition is very precarious. I request you to give him the benefit of your darshan, and I have faith that he will be all right by your blessings."

Accordingly, Ramdas was taken to the cottage of the wounded man. Ramdas found him perfectly restless through pain, and his relations crowded round him with deep anxiety. Ramdas was made to pass his hands over the body and the affected part of the wounded man. Then he left the house and returned to Gulab Rai's. Next day he left Chhattarpur in the Maharaja's motor-car for Navagaon, where he dined in the company of the saints and proceeded by the same motor-car to Harpalpur station, and here catching a train, arrived in Jhansi. Ramdas learnt later that the Maharaja's servant had recovered from the serious hurt. God be praised!

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CHAPTER XLI

LIMBDI

(i) "Ramdas wants your mind"

From Jhansi Ramdas travelled towards Kathiawar and made a few days' halt at Wadhwan City. Almost the same programme as on the last occasion was gone through here. He paid visits to Bala mandir and the kuti of Jivraj Baloo. He stopped with Dr. Shukla who with his pure-hearted wife tended Ramdas with great kindness. On the termination of his stay here, he was guided by the friends of Limbdi to that State.

As on the previous occasions he made his residence at Kantilal's house, where the old story of rushing visitors was repeated. Raja Ram and mother Elizabeth came to the house to see him. The old sugarcandy mothers daily visited him with the offerings of the sweet crystals. The wealthy brothers, Ugarchand Shet and Mohanbhai dropped in twice a day. Invitations to dinner poured in from all sides. Here Ramdas came in touch with two new friends, Popatbhai and Joshi.

Popatbhai stuck on to Ramdas for over a month. He was a pure and selfless soul. He was a Jain by birth and a staunch disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, and had the benefit of living in the Sabarmati ashram of Ahmedabad for some years. He was clad in khaddar from top to toe. He observed restrictions in food. He eschewed salt and chillies. He was a simple, sincere and ever willing servant of God, i.e., of humanity. He took a great liking for Ramdas and became attached to him and so kept constant company with him.

Joshi was the Municipal Chairman of the State. He had lived for many years in South Africa and was one of those

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who courted jail along with thousands in that historic passive resistance struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. He invited Ramdas to his house where he and his modest wife and lively children showed great kindness and affection for him.

One day, at Ugarchand Shet's, he dined with his several friends. After meals, when he was sitting in the drawing room of his palatial house, the Shet said in a mock-serious mood:

"Swami, I am a business-man, a commission agent in trade, and I am very wealthy. I promise you a decent commission if if you would show me Ram whom I am so eager to see."

"Well," replied Ramdas, "Ramdas can show you Ram provided you present him with the kind of commission he demands. He does not want your wealth. Assure him that you would hand over the thing he wants from you and you shall see Ram in all His magnificence."

"What is it that you want?" he inquired with great eagerness.

"Do you promise before Ramdas tells you what it is?" Ramdas asked.

He thought for a while and said: "I cannot promise. Kindly tell me what is the commission you demand and I shall see if I am in a position to grant it."

Ramdas was about to drop the matter, but the Shet insisted on Ramdas' speaking out about the commission. At last Ramdas enlightened him.

"What Ramdas wants from you in exchange for the vision of God is your mind. Surrender it up to Ramdas totally and you will see God face to face."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, throwing up his hands: "I cannot do that."

"Right," Ramdas replied, "you wish to retain the mind

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for owning this house, your vast riches, property and relations as yours and undergo anxiety, cares and worries concerning them all. Please yourself. The truth is, unless you give over your mind entirely to the thought of God and lay everything that you cling to as belonging to you at His feet, you cannot have Him. In short, complete and unqualified surrender to God alone entitles you to His grace and darshan."

During this visit Raja Ram was overflowing with love, as also mother Elizabeth, and Ramdas had several invitations to the palace and the mother's bungalow. Once a dinner was arranged by the mother to a select party at her house, "Sri Krishna Nivas." She also brought about in her garden a meeting of several saints the same morning.

A sadhu by name Prakashanand, famous in Kathiawar, had also been residing in Limbdi at the time. Ramdas had the privilege of coming in touch with him for the first time at this garden-party. He was over fifty years of age, short and stout in build. He used to cover himself with a solid, torn quilt, and carry an earthen pot and two sticks. It was said that he preferred to spend his nights mostly in cremation grounds. He spoke slowly and in a low tone. He was exact, wise and simple in his ways. Besides this mahatma there were two or three Jain sadhus, one of whom came on foot from a distance of fifteen miles specially to meet Ramdas. Raja Ram, Joshi, Popatbhai and Kantilal were also present.

Raja Ram humorously remarked: "Ramdas, I am not going to present you with any more clothing. You gave away the precious things I gave you last time to some greedy brahman."

"You may call him by any name you like, but for Ramdas he was Ram," Ramdas replied and added: "In regard to your present of clothes Ramdas never asked for any and has no need."

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for them. God provides him whenever he wants."

The dinner over, the party dispersed.

The mother took Ramdas out on a visit to the house of Raja Ram's sister who accorded them a hearty welcome. Here Ramdas observed the remarkably meek and egoless nature of mother Elizabeth. While Ramdas was given a cushion for a seat spread on a carpet on the floor, she was offered a chair to sit on, but she refused to take the chair as, by so doing, she would be assuming a higher position than Ramdas. She therefore squatted on the carpet beside him. At the time of leaving the house by the staircase Ramdas was jumping down the steps and the mother kindly hinted: "Beware, Ramdas, don't lose balance."

"Mother,'" Ramdas replied significantly, "Ramdas never loses balance."

"You are very clever, Ramdas," she remarked laughing, "you have always a ready wit."

Ramdas returned to Kantilal's house.

(ii) What fools them—an explanation

One day Ramdas had an invitation from the local ashram of Jain sadhus. Popatbhai accompanied him to the ashram. A dozen sadhus including those who attended the mother's memorable garden party had a long discussion with Ramdas on the question of the moment, ahimsa. They put him several questions regarding the state of dwandwatita and trigunatita. Ramdas added a vein of humour to his talks and evoked frequent laughter from the sadhus. The leader among them asked Ramdas with a serious concern:

"Swami, don't you filter water before drinking?"

"Ramdas does not attach much importance to filtration," Ramdas replied, "unless the water is dirty. The flowing water

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of the river which he often used to drink with his hands needed no filtration."

"There are germs in the water which you destroy by drinking," he remarked.

"You do the same through filtration," said Ramdas. "Moreover, even the drops of water well-filtered have still animalcules floating in them although these are not visible to the naked eye. A look through a powerful microscope would reveal to the sight millions of live germs in them. For health it is necessary that we should drink pure water. Destruction of the germs in water either through the heat of the stomach, filtration or boiling is inevitable."

While still the talk was going on, Popatbhai pulled Ramdas' cloth from behind and hinted that the interview might be terminated and they might leave the place. But Ramdas liked to remain a little longer answering the curious questions put by the sadhus whom he found in quite a jovial mood. After a short time, since Popatbhai was growing impatient, Ramdas had to bid adieu to the saints.

On their way back to Kantilal's house Popatbhai observed: "Swamiji, did you not notice that the Jain sadhus were all the while making fun of you? So it was that I became impatient to leave the place as soon as possible."

"You are mistaken, Ram," Ramdas answered, "they were so kind. Ramdas felt quite at ease in their cheerful company."

"There you are, Swamiji," said Popatbhai, "it is this guileless nature of yours that has made a fool of me and attracted me and all others to your person."

In the evenings there would be Ramnam dhun in Kantilal's house and Popatbhai in his sweet voice led the Bhajan. Dr. Shukla and other friends from Wadhwan paid frequent visits.

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Ramdas' daily morning visits to mother Elizabeth's bungalow continued where he also met Raja Ram and Prakashanand.

Ramdas had also, in response to her wish, to visit Bama Saheb, the old Rani at her palace. The pious lady was as usual very kind and hospitable.

She asked: "How is it that we don't attain shanti in spite of all our efforts?"

To this Ramdas replied: "Ramdas is reminded of the popular song of Kabir in which he says: The fish is thirsty in water; at this I cannot help laughing. So although we always live, move and have our being in the infinite ocean of pure-bliss, still we complain that we are miserable."

Then the learned and well-informed lady said: "True, the fish can drink water only when it turns on its side, otherwise not."

"Yes, in our case," Ramdas replied, "to completely surrender to the will of God is to turn on the side; then we are filled with the nectar of immortality."

One morning mother Elizabeth introduced Ramdas to an American tourist, a young lady, Mrs. Pym. At the first meeting she discussed about the movement of Mahatma Gandhi and her interview with him. She held a prejudiced view about the Mahatma and his principles of public action. Ramdas told her at the close of the conversation that she was welcome to differ from the Mahatma, but to ascribe to him a deliberate aim at fame and self-importance as she did, was wrong. He added that she must admit it was but right that India should be self-sufficient and independent. India must learn to maintain herself with regard to her main needs of life, namely, food and clothing, from her own produce and manufacture. Ramdas did not believe in India's isolation from the rest of the world which would mean her decay and death. She must have free intercourse:

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with other countries of the world, but such intercourse should be based upon equality and independence. The cult of hate was ruinous. Ramdas might not agree with Mahatmaji in all that he said and did, but he had deep regard and love for him, so be it with her and all.

In the afternoon, the same day, there was a meeting at Shet Mohanlal's residence. This time three ladies were present, each of them belonging to a different nationality. Mother Elizabeth was of course an English lady, Mrs. Pym an American and a new arrival, Miss Krouse was a German. Prince Pratap Singh, a younger son of Raja Ram, was also one of the party.

Mother Elizabeth got copies of Ramdas' second booklet, "At the Feet of God," in the publication of which she had helped and to which she had written a loving foreword, and desired that Ramdas should present them to the ladies. The ladies asked him to have his autograph on the presented copies. Accordingly, he wrote down his love and regards to them signing: "From your child Ramdas." On a previous occasion, at the wish of mother Elizabeth, Ramdas had written the same words on a copy which she had for her own use. Seeing the exact similarity of the wording in the case of the other ladies, she remarked, when they were alone together later, "Ramdas, don't you think this mother's love (referring to herself) is greater than that of others? I expected you would make some difference in your estimation of my love in comparison with that of the other mothers."

"For Ramdas all mothers are alike," replied Ramdas.

After sundry talks about the ways of Sabarmati ashram, which was recently visited by Mrs. Pym, during which Ramdas played the role of a silent listener, he had a short conversation with Miss Krouse. This young lady had adopted Jainism and

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had spent many long months on Mount Abu in rigorous austerities. She was simple and childlike in her manners and talks. Dressed in plain clothes, she was frank, cheerful and unsophisticated. She glanced over the pages of "At the Feet of God."

"I do not agree with you, Ramdas, in your articles of faith," she said. "I believe that by purushartha, i.e., by steady and severe discipline, alone can the contaminated and imprisoned Atman be purified and liberated. I do not believe in the theory of the pristine and eternal purity and freedom of the soul, with ignorance only as a cloud over it, and also I do not believe that the mere removal of the cloud means realization of immortality as Vedantists hold."

"You may approach the Truth, mother, in whatever way you like. The question simply is, which is the easiest and quickest path that takes you to the goal?" Ramdas observed.

After a course of milk and fruits the party broke up.

Now Ramdas received a call from Una, a far away corner of Kathiawar in Junagad State. Maganlal, the young friend who was Ramdas' companion during his former visits to this province, was now employed as a teacher in Una. It was he who was drawing him to the place. Popatbhai also started with Ramdas.

Before leaving Limbdi, Ramdas paid a last visit to mother Elizabeth. When parting she remarked:

"Ramdas, you have reached in spiritual attainment the last but one step. You have still to rise higher. You are blessed. It is all due to your samskaras of previous births."

Ramdas with folded palms replied: "Ramdas does not know what stage he has reached, higher or lower. Neither does he care to know. He is simply where God has placed him and he is content."

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CHAPTER XLII

UNA—BOMBAY

(i) The dose of poison

In due time, Ramdas arrived with Popatbhai at Veraval, a prominent sea-port on the Kathiawar coast. Here they stopped with a Gujarati doctor in his hospital, who took them in the evening to attend the kirtan and discourse of a saintly householder in the city. They also visited Prabhaspattan where, according to Bhagwat Puran, the Yadavas, members of Sri Krishna's vast family, fought among themselves bringing about the total destruction of their race. Here in an extensive plain was a small enclosure in which there stood an ancient peepal tree. The fence was of iron bars fixed on low walls. In the niche of one of the walls was seen an image of Sri Krishna in a reclining posture. It was said that this was the spot where Sri Krishna shuffled off his body as the result of his being hit by an arrow from the bow of a passing hunter.

It was arranged Ramdas should start from Veraval by a cargo brig that was bound for Una. The brig was an open boat filled with gunny bags of merchandise. It was to leave the port in the night. So, early at night Ramdas and Popatbhai boarded the vessel. The season was winter. Hence the cold was severe. The cutting sea breeze blew over the boat with full force. They possessed hardly any extra clothing. They coiled themselves in the hollows between the bags and covered themselves with the single cotton cloth they each had. The boat left the shores about ten in the night. It was believed at first that the boat would reach the port Una by the ensuing morning. But, for lack of wind the boat made very slow progress;

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morning dawned and they were still far away from the destination. Cold in the night was now succeeded by the heat of the sun. They were well-nigh fried in the sun the whole day, the boat having reached its destination past six in the evening. They had also to observe a partial fast, for they had no food to eat except a plantain each and they had even no water to drink.

At the landing place the odour of dried fish that filled the air was too much for Popatbhai. He expressed his disgust in strong terms and did not wish to take this route for return journey.

On landing they met Maganlal and another friend who had come to receive them. A six-mile walk brought them to Una. Ramdas and Popatbhai remained with Maganlal in his rooms on the ground floor of a big building, the upper floor of which was occupied by a Parsi chemist and his family. Maganlal was living alone.

The news of Ramdas' arrival spread in the town and many people came to see him, of whom mention has to be made of a Parsi chemist, Dr. Mahadevia, a Khoja and the schoolmasters.

Ramdas had invitations to dinner from the doctor and the Parsi chemist. Their children and wives also treated Ramdas with great kindness. The Parsi chemist, a quiet, earnest and simple soul, spent most of his time in Ramdas' company. He was so much enamoured of Ramnam that he commenced repeating it ceaselessly. One day an incident happened which tended to strengthen his faith in God.

While he was sitting with Ramdas, a travelling agent of drug-stores came to interview the chemist friend. In the course of their business talk the Parsi chemist asked the agent to supply him with a certain poisonous drug. The agent expressed

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his surprise that the chemist's stock of that drug should have gone off so soon, as he had supplied the stuff, a good quantity only very recently. Then the question came up as to what was the maximum dose of the drug. Now the Parsi friend came to know that he had that day given to a patient a dose of the same drug by mistake twenty times the quantity of the maximum dose. The medicine was to be taken at seven o'clock in the evening and the talk here was going on about the same time. The Parsi coming to realize the consequences of his oversight got thoroughly frightened and, losing no time, directly ran up to the patient's house. But fortunately for him the patient had not swallowed the death-dealing dose of poison. He snatched away the packet of the powder and hastened back to where Ramdas sat, and falling at his feet said with great emotion, his eyes filled wth tears:

"Swamiji, you have saved me today from the gallows. It is all due to your kindness." Then he narrated the whole story.

"It is the remembrance of God that saved you, friend; the saviour is always God," Ramdas replied.

For this lapse on his part he undertook a fast of three days during which he subsisted merely on water, and Ramnam never left his lips. He also eschewed sleep at night. The Ram-mantram rang on his tongue continuously.

Visits to the sugarcane fields of the Khoja friend, where he was given a cool drink of the cane juice, and to the noted shrine of Mahadev in the suburbs of the town comprised the other events of the earlier part of Ramdas' stay in Una. Latterly, he was presented to the boys of the local High School in which Maganlal was a teacher, and also to the girls of two primary schools. In all of them Ramdas delivered short speeches upon "The right conduct of boys and girls."

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While returning from the High School he joined in the game of cricket with the boys on the play-ground. When he stood up for bowling, his very first ball knocked off the mid-wicket. Amidst the laughter of the lookers-on, Ramdas left the field.

In the hospital there was a post-mortem examination over the body of a young man who had died by an accident. With the permission of the doctor, Popatbhai was present at the examination. He carefully scrutinized all the internal organs of the human body. Directly it was over, he came to Ramdas and remarked:

"Swamiji, the stomach in our body is after all such a small bag that I wonder why we stuff it with so much food. The stomach, judging from its size, needs only a small quantity of food. We must be overfilling it causing it to bulge out and produce a pot belly."

Ramdas laughed, as also the other friends who listened to his humorous but pertinent observations.

Dr. Mahadevia belonged to the Tilak school of thought. He had many a discussion with Ramdas on the question of non-violence.

Ramdas remained in Una for over a week and his time of departure came. Popatbhai would not agree to travel by the sea route. So a bullock-cart was engaged to convey them to Veraval. They were warned that the road was very bad. The cart was half-filled with straw on the top of which was spread a thick mattress with two pillows. The sides of the carriage were fenced with loose ropes. As the cart progressed they found it impossible to assume sitting posture. The stalwart bullocks dragged the cart behind them ruthlessly over the hard, dry, rocky and uneven tract. The cart rolled on, swaying from

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side to side, punctuated by sudden thuds and knocks. The occupants of the cart now and again bumped against each other. They had to clutch at the loose ropes of the fence for very life, lest they should be thrown out on to the road through the wide gaps in them. Sleep and rest were out of question. For all their efforts they could not retain a single position for more than a minute. They seemed to be a pair of sardines just out of the sea on the dry sands, fluttering and leaping over each other!

What with the sudden jumps of the cart and the clash of the bodies their very bones seemed to rattle in their frames. Ramdas laughed and laughed at the unique experience, and said with a great amount of truth, "Out of the frying pan into the fire." Popatbhai was silent. The distance to be covered before they could reach Veraval was about forty-eight miles and would take not less than twenty-four hours. For an hour, at long intervals, there were four halts at the wayside villages. When there were only ten miles still left to reach Veraval, Ramdas jumped out of the cart and proposed to walk the distance and Popatbhai followed him. At dusk they reached Veraval.

The cart arrived later; except for the loss of a pillow which must have dropped on the road, there was no other mishap. The night was spent in a small room on the third storey of a huge business house belonging to a young merchant.

Now Popatbhai who is a man of simple habits had a deep-rooted dislike for smoking. He would go about advising every smoker, who came in contact with him, to give up the habit, at the same time, expatiating upon its manifold evils. But by a strange irony of fate, he was the storekeeper of bidis for Ramdas who was given to smoking! His high regard for Ramdas would not permit of his looking upon this habit of Ramdas as condemnatory. In the small room he smoked. The windows

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being very high and small in size, clouds of smoke gathered in the room, thick and fast.

"Ramji, the nauseating smell of smoke must be very trying to your nostrils which are unused to it," remarked Ramdas.

"Not at all," he replied quickly; "on the contrary, the smoke you puff out has been purifying the atmosphere." Verily, true love sees no defects and this is the greatest quality of love!

(ii) God does everything for the best

Popatbhai parted from Ramdas at Veraval since he had to return to Wadhwan city, his native place, while Ramdas boarded the B.I.S.N. steamer sailing for Bombay. The steamer started from Veraval in the night and reached the Bombay port in the evening next day. He made his way straight to Sanjivrao's rooms where he gave an agreeable surprise both to Sanjivrao and his wife.

This time Ramdas' stay in Bombay extended to over two weeks, and he had to go through a fully crowded programme. Hundreds of visitors from various parts of Bombay poured in to see him from early morning until late in the night, and he was kept either busy talking or entertained with sweet kirtan by the devotees who could sing. Of these a young friend, Ratnakar by name, arranged for two discourses by Ramdas in the hall of the Saraswat Association, Gamdevi. On each occasion there was a crowded audience mainly of Saraswats. The first discourse was in English on "The Goal of Life" and the second in Konkani on "Karmayoga." The second was largely attended by Saraswat ladies.

As Ramdas spoke extempore, which he always did, the supreme bliss he was enjoying flowed out in words. At the time he found himself in a state of perfect ecstasy. He talked freely like a child before the motherly audience, for the friends

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and mothers assembled heard him with all love and patience.

The substance of his discourse on the Goal of Life was: "The highest gift, this human life, is granted to us by God in order to realize Him—the supreme Reality—who is eternal bliss and peace. God-realization means universal vision, i.e., to become ever conscious of our union with an impersonal, calm, pure, changeless and all-pervading existence and look upon all form and change as the expression of that Truth. This exalted state is attained by constant attunement of the mind to the single thought of the Truth through a ceaseless stream of remembrance and meditation of it. The condition of our progress towards the Truth depends upon our ardour and intensity for its attainment. When we understand the Truth as the goal of life, our approach to it becomes easy and rapid. The aim of life should not be anything short of this highest consummation of human life. Concentration of thought and effort is the first desideratum. For concentration the easiest method is the constant repetition of the divine Name. He who possesses the Name is possessed of the Truth. What has made Ramdas swim always in an ocean of bliss and peace? It is the divine Name. He is present before you, as a living example, showing the potency of the Name."

Friends invited him to Santa Cruz and Matunga where also he had to deliver two discourses. God willed that His servant and child should thus be drawn out from obscurity into the limelight of Bombay to preach about His greatness and the glory of His Name.

In the course of his discourse at Santa Cruz, when he touched upon the golden principle "God does everything for the best," he narrated a popular story in support of the deep truth underlying the motto.

Once a king with his minister followed by his retinue went

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into the depths of a jungle on a hunting expedition. Now the minister was well-known for his wisdom. He held the motto: 'God does everything for the best,' and whenever anyone went to him for advice in his trouble, woe or misfortune, the minister would console the distressed party by inducing him to acknowledge the truth of the saying.

The king and the minister in their hunt for game separated from the followers and roamed far into the interior of the extensive forest and eventually lost their way. The sun rose to the meridian. The king was oppressed with fatigue and hunger. They rested in the shade of a tree.

"Minister," said the exhausted king, "I am sorely upset through pangs of hunger. Can you get me something to eat?"

The minister looked round and discovered fruits on the trees. Climbing up a tree he plucked a few ripe fruits and presented them to the king. The king in his haste to eat the fruit, while cutting it with a penknife, chopped off a bit of his finger. With a cry of pain he dropped both the fruit and the knife, his injured finger streaming with blood.

"Ho!" he cried out, "how it pains—O, minister."

"God does everything for the best," put in the minister quietly.

These words tended only to rouse the already petulant king. He flew into a rage and cried out:

"Fool, truce to your philosophy! I have had enough of it. While I am suffering from excruciating agony the only consolation you can tender is: 'God does everything for the best.' How can this be for the best when my pain is intense and real! Avaunt, I will have nothing of you in future. Get out of my sight, and never show me your face again." The king could not control himself and rising up kicked the minister furiously and commanded him to take himself off at once. While the

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minister was leaving the king, he calmly reiterated: "God does everything for the best."

Now the king was left alone. He tore a strip of his garment and bandaged his injured finger and was given to sad reflections, when two stalwart men were seen approaching him. They instantly fell on the king and bound him hand and foot. Struggle or resistance was utterly useless, as the men were sturdy gaints in build.

The frightened king now asked:

"What are you going to do with me?"

They replied: "We want you to be sacrificed at the altar of our goddess Kali. It is the custom to offer to her a human sacrifice once a year. The time has arrived for it and we were on the look out for a human being and we are fortunate in having found you."

These words of his captors thoroughly alarmed the king. He remonstrated: "Let me go, I am the king of a province. You cannot, therefore, kill me for the sacrifice."

The men laughed and said:

"Then this year's sacrifice is going to be unique, and our goddess will be highly pleased when she finds that we bring to her altar this time an exalted personage as an offering. Come along."

They dragged the victim to the Kali shrine, not far away from the spot. He was duly placed on the sacrificial altar. Things were ready for the death-blow, when the priest observing the bandage on his left-hand forefinger, removed it, and discovered that a portion of it was cut off. He said to the men: "This man is not acceptable to our goddess. Set him free. The goddess wants a whole man, while the man here has a defect in his body. A bit of his finger is gone. Let him go."

Accordingly, untying the ropes with which he was bound,

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the men set the king free and allowed him to depart in peace.

Now the king remembered the words of the minister, uttered when his finger received the wound: "God does everything for the best"—indeed, had it not been for that fortunate cut he would have by now been a dead man. He felt keenly for the ill-treatment he had meted out to his friend. He was anxious to repair the blunder by begging his forgiveness. So he rambled in the wood, called aloud the name of the minister, and at last found him. The minister was resting beneath a tree. Going up to him the king embraced him with extreme love and said: "Friend, I seek your forgiveness for the cruelty I inflicted on you. The truth of your golden saying is brought home to me."

Then he narrated the incident of the intended sacrifice to the goddess, and how he was set free on account of the defect in his hand, caused by the knife-cut.

"Sire," replied the minister, "you have done me no harm. So there is nothing to forgive. In truth, you have saved me. While you kicked and drove me away, you may remember I repeated the same saying: 'God does everything for the best.' Now in my case as well it has come true. For, if you had not driven me away, I would have been in your company when the men of Kali captured you and, when they discovered that you were unfit for the sacrifice, they would have offered me instead, since I had no such defect in my body as the one you had so providentially acquired. So God does everything for the best."

The story produced a deep impression on the minds of the friends who assembled to hear Ramdas.

(iii) The dance on the head of Shiva

Durgashanker, an elder brother of Kantilal of Limbdi, resided in Bombay. He was Ramdas' fellow student during his old life at the V. J. Technical Institute of Bombay. He and

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his pious wife were paying frequent visits to Ramdas at Sanjivrao's. He proposed to take Ramdas on a trip to the noted Elephanta caves near Bombay.

Early one day, a party of about twenty persons including ladies started on the trip. Sanjivrao and Ratnakar also formed the party. They boarded a brig specially engaged for their use. As the brig sailed on the sea with an undulating movement, the friends entertained the party with choice devotional songs to the accompaniment of a hand harmonium, which they had taken with them. By noon they drew up at the landing jetty leading to the hill containing the famous cave. On alighting they sought a quiet place for their dinner. They had provided themselves with various kinds of refreshments. After dinner they sauntered about to see the caves.

The first cave they entered, the largest one of the lot, was a spacious hall, cut out of a giant granite rock, supported on solid, beautifully carved pillars standing at short intervals. Inside the cave was a shrine having on its facing wall three compartments, each of which represented figures of images embossed in relief. The middle figure was the huge head of a three-faced god. The sculpture was exquisite. The faces bore a calm and peaceful appearance. On either side of this visage were life-size images exhibiting the same skill and mastery of art. To the right of the cave there was a reservoir of water fed by a perennial spring issuing from the side of the hill. To the left was a plain rock-cut temple with an open court-yard in front.

The party sat in the court-yard and again the singers entertained the party with their soul-elevating music. About three o'clock they went out looking for new places to be seen. Going round the hill, at its base were found many other small caves at various distances from each other. At one place descrying a big Shiva Ling in a cave-temple, Ramdas ran up in advance

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and mounting on the image commenced dancing on its head in ecstasy. The friends who followed later were both surprised and delighted to behold Ramdas dancing on the head of Shiva. The image was over five feet in height and three feet in diameter.

When it was nearing four o'clock they started on their homeward journey. Now the boat swayed on the waves with greater majesty, now bounded, then rose and fell. The cool evening breeze blew over them keeping them absorbed in the sweet memories of the blissful day. By evening the party reached the city.

Here Ramdas was inspired by Ram to write a letter to Anandrao of Kasaragod expressing a wish to have an ashram in that place on the Pilikunji hill. He also suggested that it might be named "Anandashram."

The days in Bombay passed quickly in continued rounds of bliss. The divine Name spread far and wide.

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CHAPTER XLIII

ANGAR—SHOLAPUR
ERNAKULAM—KASARAGOD

(i) The Miracles

The friends in Sholapur district were keenly longing to have Ramdas in their midst. So the next place Ramdas visited was this district. Here, as on previous occasions, he was welcomed by vast masses of people with great acclamation. He was taken from village to village in procession and honoured with the grandeur and display peculiar to the East. In one village where he stayed for a week, there was a unique devotional ferment among its inhabitants. People of all castes and creeds mingled together. Kirtan, bhajan, harikatha and feast became the order of the day.

Janardan Pant and Prem Singh were Ramdas' close companions, of whom the latter was perfectly mad with devotion. He was for days so inebriated with the divine emotion that he would be often unconscious of his body and surroundings. He spent days and nights dancing and singing God's Name.

Mothers went into ecstasies at the sight of Ramdas. Govind Joshi's wife would every evening wave round Ramdas her hands containing salt to ward off the evil eye—a custom observed by the Hindu mothers in regard to their children! Prem Singh took Ramdas to his village Diksal where, in the presence of a big gathering, he bathed him with curds and milk mixed with sugar, ghee, and honey which they denominate as "Panchamrit Abhishek."

A humorous incident took place during Ramdas' visit to one of the villages named Khandali. He was invited by the

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Kulkarni of the place. With Ramdas had come over fifty friends from the preceding villages. The meals provided by the hosts everywhere in these parts consisted of sweet cakes and ladoos. When all the friends assembled, sometime before dinner, Ramdas asked a boy to fetch a few bunches of neem leaves—neem is a tree common in that place, the leaves of which are bitter to the taste, but they have medicinal properties. The boy brought the leaves. Now Ramdas proposed to the friends to join him in eating them. At this the expression on their faces underwent a change from one of cheerfulness to its reverse. One by one they slipped away offering some lame excuse, and so Ramdas alone had to eat his share of the leaves. When the dinner time arrived, all the friends turned up without an exception!

Ramdas went round over thirty villages. It was a time of unprecedented enthusiasm, bustle and joy, both for Ramdas and the villagers. Amongst those who felt a great attraction for Ramdas and sought his constant company was the young lad Maruti, who has been mentioned in the early part of the narrative.

In Angar, Ramdas had to stay for eight days before his departure to Kame, a railway station. The eight days were characterized by incessant activities on the part of the villagers in kirtans, bhajan and feasts. On the last day, Ramdas was taken round all the lanes and streets of the village in a procession consisting of thousands of people with music and the country band. The flags and other emblems of the temple were also carried in front of him. The crowds followed up to the outskirts of the village where Ramdas, taking his final leave, raced on towards the railway station which lay at a distance of nearly four miles from Angar. About fifty villagers followed him.

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Word was sent in advance to the station master, a devout brahman, who was anxious to entertain Ramdas for an hour before the arrival of the train. Ramdas and the party reached the station in the evening. They were led directly to the residence of the station master. He had expected not more than a dozen people with Ramdas and so had prepared meals only for that number. But the number actually exceeded fifty. The host and his people at home grew anxious as to how they could satisfy all the people that had come. There was no time to prepare meals again. However, the friends were asked to sit for supper and, strange as it would appear, the food sufficed the whole lot and there was no deficiency in anything. An old woman of the house came out after the feeding was over, and with hands folded in salutation said: "The ways of God are simply inexplicable. He has worked a miracle in our house."

After the meals, the party sat on the platform and for about fifteen minutes Prem Singh entertained them with songs of Brahmanand in his melodious voice. Soon the train arrived and Ramdas got into a carriage accompanied by a few friends. Now one of the party, who came to the station for the send off, handed to Ramdas a small bag containing some groundnuts, sugar-candy, parched rice, etc., all mixed up together. Ramdas, thinking of distributing the eatables as prasad to the friends on the platform, who now crowded at the door of the compartment occupied by him, took them out by handfuls from the bag and commenced to distribute them freely to the friends. Seeing this, the passengers in other compartments poured down and coming to where Ramdas was, stretched forth their hands for 'prasad'. He went on giving away the eatables from the bag. The amazing thing was the bag would never become empty. He must have distributed its contents to more than a

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hundred persons until the train moved away from the station and still the bag contained some 'prasad.'

Here a few words about the nature of the villagers surrounding the Pandharpur shrine in Sholapur District may not be out of place. These simple village folk, besides being sincere and honest, have an extremely kind and hospitable disposition. No traveller or guest is allowed to go from their doors without receiving due service from the household. They are humble and unassuming in their manners. They take it that the guest is Vithoba Himself, the deity of Pandharpur and, on the side of the guest, he too considers that he is fed and kindly treated by the same deity. Their mode of living is quite plain; coarse but wholesome food and thick clothing put on in the old fashion suffice their needs. They are hardy and industrious people. Time is of no account with them and so they are not bound by its tyranny. They are tolerant, generous, and self-sacrificing to a degree. They do not harass their minds and others' with sceptical doubts. They implicitly believe in the workings of Providence and live always in submission to Him. Their women are also of the same incorruptible nature.

(ii) A straight hit

For the Ekadashi, Ramdas was taken again to Pandharpur where he came across troops of devotees whom he had met on his visit to the villages. From Pandharpur on his way to Akalkot, wherefrom he had an invitation, he made a halt for a day in Sholapur.

Prem Singh, who was in his company, desired that he should stop with a relation of his who was a great devotee. Ramdas agreeing, the party consisting of Janardan Pant, Prem Singh, Maruti and Madhavrao proceeded to the devotee's house. Here already a noted saint was a guest of the householder and

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a puja of a photo of the saint's guru was in full progress when Ramdas entered. Ramdas directly went up to the verandah where the worship was held. A seat of cushions was by the side of the photo: the asan of the saint. Prem Singh, who carried a deerskin for Ramdas, spread it on the cushion and beckoned him to take his seat on it. Ramdas unconsciously obeyed and sat down whilst all the congregated people were standing and the saint was performing the puja in all eclat. The puja over, the saint without caring even to look at Ramdas, retired to an inner room of the house as a mark of displeasure at the apparently insulting behaviour of Ramdas. In fact, Prem Singh had unwittingly made him sit on the gadi or asan of the saint who must have surely boiled and fumed at Ramdas' gross insolence.

But Ramdas was unconcerned and indifferent. Next, to make reparation for the lapse and scenting unpleasantness, Prem Singh, preparing another seat by the side of Ramdas, requested the saint to come out and grace it, which he however did with manifest reluctance. Then garlanding both, he saluted them. The saint was not yet pacified.

The saint asked Ramdas who his guru was to which Ramdas replied, "Ramdas' guru is residing in his own heart and in the hearts of all." At this the saint sniffed contemptuously and left his seat.

In the evening, as usual, in the programme of the saint there was reading of Dasbodh, the well-known work of Saint Samarth Ramdas, the eminent guru of Shivaji of historic fame. In the course of his discourse the saint levelled at first veiled sarcasms at Ramdas and at last broke out into the peroration: "Nowadays, it is common for any man in the street to don the sannyasi robe, pose himself as guru and travel from place to place for collecting disciples. Of this type you have one in

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the person of the sadhu sitting here," and he pointed his finger directly at Ramdas. Ramdas could only smile at the invective. After his pravachan was over, Maruti, the lad, was called upon to speak on the oft-quoted and sublime sloka of the Gita: "Sarvadharman parityajya," etc. ..... "Abandoning all dharmas come to Me alone for shelter, grieve not, I shall liberate thee from all sins." The boy delivered himself in a breathless outflow for about half-an-hour. Lastly the saint asked Ramdas to speak a few words in Hindi.

At first Ramdas started on the universal darshan which he emphasized as the goal of all spiritual endeavour. Then he came to the means of its attainment. He held out service of saints and Ramnam as the only sadhanas for the purification of the mind and heart, which was the essential condition for achieving that supreme vision. He congratulated the assembled devotees on their good fortune in having an opportunity for serving a saint. Pointing to the saint by Ramdas' side, he added, that *there* was a saint for them to serve and be benefitted. He exhorted them not to allow such a God-given occasion to slip by.

For the night Ramdas was escorted to the house of a merchant devotee who once had an occasion to entertain him at Angar. He was away from home, but his pure-hearted wife welcomed him and the party into her house. The saint whom Ramdas met at Prem Singh's relation's house had asked him to be present next morning when he would expound Yoga Vasishtha. But Prem Singh stood resolutely against Ramdas' attending it. The friends who were with him made adverse comments on the saint's behaviour towards him. But he stopped them, saying: "Why do you forget that it is Ram Himself playing that part? He assumes various characters."

Early on the following day, the party left Sholapur by

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motor-bus for Akalkot. By midday they reached the town and were put up in the house of a friend named Taksade. He was all kindness and hospitality. This friend arranged for a discourse in English by Ramdas at the Samadhi temple of the late renowned saint of the place, Akalkot Bava. A few hours before the engagement, an elderly vakil who was stricken with grief over the demise of his near relation came to see Ramdas. In his talk he roundly attacked faith in the existence of a God. Ramdas had a few words with him and a marvellous change came over him. He took Ramdas to his dwelling and was all humility and kindness.

In the evening, among a large number of friends who attended the discourse at the temple, the vakil friend was one who sat straight in front of Ramdas. The latter spoke for about forty-five minutes. He observed the vakil shedding streams of tears. It was evident that he was touched by Ramdas' repeated exhortations to believe in God and develop devotion for Him.

That very night Ramdas had to start from Akalkot to Bangalore. The railway station lay at a distance of six miles from the city. A horse tonga was hired to take him to the station. The vakil friend was there to take final leave of him. When the tonga was about to start, the friend was overpowered by strong emotion and wept on account of separation. Then, again, as the tonga was nearing the railway station. Maruti cried like an inconsolable child at the thought of his approaching severance from Ramdas. Janardan Pant took him to task for his exhibition of feelings in that manner, reminding him of the high philosophy he used to propound while dilating on the Gita slokas.

They reached the station and, when the train arrived, Prem Singh and Madhavrao also started weeping. So in the

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midst of their wails Ramdas and Janardan Pant, who proposed to accompany him as far as Bangalore, got into the train and left Sholapur District.

(iii) A mother sees a Vision

In due time the train slowed down at the Bangalore station and halted. Alighting they made their way straight to Malleswaram in the company of Bhavanishankerrao who had come to the station to receive them. In Bangalore, Ramdas, this time, spent only a few days. Janardan Pant gave the devoted household the delight of listening to his harikatha performance. The day of departure having come Janardan Pant left for his district by an earlier train. At the time of bidding farewell to Ramdas, Janardan Pant also wept, when Ramdas reminded him: "Ramji, what is this you are doing? What about your words to Maruti when he manifested similar feelings?"

Ramdas also started at the appointed time and it was night. His next destination was Ernakulam in Cochin State. The railway carriage in which he travelled was crowded. He secured a seat at the corner of a short bench. A passenger on the bench was sleeping at full length and Ramdas sat in such a manner as to cause the least disturbance to the sleeping man. The seat in front of him was occupied by three men, two of whom were Musalmans. From their gilt turbans and the showy badges, they appeared to be sepoys of some eminent personage. A steady look at the oval brass plates on the red badges revealed the fact that they belonged to the Cochin State. Both the sepoys, as night advanced, began to doze in their seats. The elder of the two, fearing that his neat gilt turban might tumble down while nodding through sleep, placed it near Ramdas on his seat and commanded him in a gruff voice: "Hey, take care of my turban; see that it does not fall down. Watch and guard it

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well." Ramdas signified by a 'hum' that he would do as bidden.

The sepoys now entered deep into the land of sleep, and Ramdas fell to watching the precious turban given in his charge. A little later, the sleeping man on his bench stretched his legs straight, and Ramdas had to move to the very extremity of the bench and so was obliged to take up the turban and place the valuable charge tenderly on his lap. Still further the passenger lengthened himself. Ramdas thought that he was not an ordinary human being but an India-rubber man, for he seemed to stretch himself to any extent! Ramdas now, seeing the floor below the opposite seat vacant and free from luggage, slipped down to the place with the turban. Placing the turban near his head on a portion of his cloth, Ramdas took a reclining posture since the low place did not permit of sitting upright.

The train ran on unmindful of the fantastic positions assumed by the passengers who were huddled up within its compartments. Ramdas also dozed away. As the morning light was streaking in through the windows, he was startled by a soul-racking, sharp and strange cry above him. It was the gruff voice of the sepoy, owner of the turban, who was heaping curses on the rogue who disappeared with his head gear. Now Ramdas slowly slid out of the nook with the turban in his hand. At the sight of the turban, the sepoy leapt through joy and wresting it from Ramdas' hands cried: "So you were below the seat! Ha! how could I know? Thank Allah, I have my turban back." And he stroked his long grey beard with evident self-complacence.

Ramdas now came to Shoranur Junction where he met Sanjivrao in whose escort he caught train to Ernakulam and, by midday, reached the destination.

As usual Ramdas stopped with Sanjivrao at whose house

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in the mornings and evenings a number of friends who had been visiting Ramdas on the previous occasions came to have talks with him. After dark there would be every day kirtan in Sanjivrao's house by his wife and children who sang in a melodious voice the abhangas of Tukaram and other saints and also God's Names. A few friends including Veeraraghava Iyer would attend the function. All the friends would be absorbed in the blissful contemplation of God for about two hours when the music was going on.

In regard to the recent illness of Veeraraghava Iyer, an extraordinary incident which took place has to be described here in some detail. Sometime ago this friend fell seriously ill and his life was despaired of. He dropped into a state of coma having lost all external consciousness. In this state he remained for a whole night. His devoted wife was in close attendance on him. She was keeping watch on this critical night. Past midnight, an irresistible wave of sleep overpowering her, she fell into a short nap. When she woke up with usual anxiety she beheld a strange vision. She discovered a sannyasi sitting on her husband's bed by his side. She was surprised how the sadhu could have come at that time of the night. But her heart was elated with hope that her husband would recover after such an assuring sight. The vision lasted for a few moments. The figure of the sannyasi disappeared, but her heart fluttered with faith and hope. Next morning Veeraraghava Iyer came down to normal consciousness with a decided turn in his illness towards recovery. In a few days he came round and was entirely free from the illness. Now his wife had no occasion to see Ramdas although her husband was seeing him at Sanjivrao's every time he visited Ernakulam.

On his complete recovery his wife spoke to her husband of the vision she had on that particular night and gave a clear

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description of the sannyasi she had beheld. Strange as it seemed to Veeraraghava Iyer, he found that her description exactly tallied with Ramdas and he expressed it to his wife, who thereafter felt a great desire to see Ramdas. He narrated this incident to several of his friends. This time when Ramdas was in Ernakulam, Veeraraghava Iyer's wife specially came to Sanjivrao's with presents to see him and convinced herself and others that she had seen that memorable night of her husband's illness the form of the very sannyasi whom she was seeing in Ramdas. Strange indeed are the ways of God! Ramdas' stay in Ernakulam coming to a close he departed thence for Kasaragod which he reached in due time.

(iv) Anandashram

Ramdas reached Kasaragod. After darshan of Gurudev and others, he remained at Anandrao's, occupying the small room of his private office. Anandrao was contemplating the erection of an ashram for him and was awaiting his return. He with Ramdas and some others went one morning to the Pilikunji hill in search of a suitable site for the ashram and at last discovered a beautiful spot belonging to Chandavar Sanjivrao. On negotiating for the plot with Sanjivrao, he agreed to hand over the small piece of land entirely for the ashram as a gift on condition that, if at any time the activities of the ashram as a religious institution should cease, the property should go back to him.

The work of constructing the building was taken up by Anandrao in right earnest, and it was hurried on as the monsoon was fast approaching. The ashram consisted of a tiny room with a raised pedestal against one of its walls to serve the purpose of a cot, and a square open verandah for receiving

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visitors and holding small kirtan parties. All round the four sides of the ashram a belt of tulsi plants was planted. The site had a charm of its own. On its southern side was the beautiful view of the Payashwini river and green fields, and on the other side were hills covered with a dense jungle of tall trees. Soft, cool breezes always played about the ashram coming from the river. In the morning and evening the air was filled with the sweet music of birds. Before the ashram was occupied Ramdas paid hurried visits to Mangalore and Puttur. Kuber Anandrao escorted him to Puttur where he was put up at the Police Inspector Sundarrao's house. Hearing of his arrival many residents of Puttur, both friends and mothers, came to see him. An enterprising young man, full of zeal for the uplift of the school boys, had started a trial institution called Shanti Shibir where boys were trained in the discipline of the body and mind. A diet free from salt and chillies was prescribed. The chief principle on which the institution worked was the observance of brahmacharya. Life was systematized, and rules and regulations controlled the activities of the students, so that they might grow up into pure, noble and fearless sons of India.

Ramdas was invited to this institution by Raman Nambiyar, the headmaster of the High School—an earnest, simple and pure soul. Thus he was brought into contact with the young aspirants and their patriotic leader. He was asked to speak a few words on brahmacharya to the boys which he did in a short speech.

The next item of interest during his stay in Puttur was the visit to the noted Sri Krishna Mandir of Sri Krishna Rao, the veteran saint of the place. Kuttanmam, as he was known to all, was all kindness and love. He possessed a glorious record of religious service and led a life of purity, simplicity and

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devotion. Always kirtan, bhajan and readings from religious texts were going on in the mandir presided over by the venerable saint.

Ramdas gave some discourses on devotion and allied subjects in Sunderrao's house which were attended mainly by mothers. He was taken to several houses for dinner and kirtan. Ramdas' brother by old birth, Narsingrao, also had him for a night's kirtan and dinner at his house. Here Ramdas noted the power of Ram-mantram on a devotee, Gopal Pai, who had the repetition of the Name going on audibly even in his sleep; his very snoring was continuous, sonorous chanting of the mantram!

Soon after Ramdas arrived at Kasaragod he paid a flying visit to Mangalore. He stopped with Sitaramrao in Mangalore and also paid a visit to mother Rukmabai at her father's. At Sitaramrao's he met an itinerant, educated sadhu who started a conversation with him on the proof of the existence of God. Ramdas had a few words with him but, as he seemed to be a sceptic and not open to conviction, Ramdas refused to be dragged into further discussion with him.

One afternoon, when Ramdas was sitting in the portico of the house with some mothers, a young man was seen standing at the gate of the compound with a bunch of plantains in hand. He stood for nearly an hour looking in the direction of the portico. When the mothers departed he came up and offering the plantains to Ramdas fell prostrate at his feet. Making him seated by his side, Ramdas went on talking about the power of God's Name and the blissful nature of true devotion of God. As he spoke on, the young man's eyes were filled with tears which coursed down his cheeks in streams. When Ramdas finished he again prostrated at Ramdas' feet and begged:

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"Be gracious to give me the upadesh of Ram-mantram."

Ramdas immediately initiated him with the mantram and he left. Ramdas was to leave Mangalore for Kasaragod the next day. An hour before departure this young man suddenly turned up, an utterly changed man! He wore the ochre or orange-coloured robes of a sannyasi and his head was clean-shaven and he had a lota in his hand.

He was a bright and healthy-looking lad having the light of meditation in his eyes. He was the youngest of four brothers who ran a coffee hotel in Mangalore. The eldest was a devout soul and was spending his time mostly in kirtan and bhajan. Ramdas heard the story of the youngest brother's conversion from him. It appeared, immediately on leaving Ramdas, the youngest brother whose name was Rayu got his head shaved and had his clothes dyed in red ochre. For his initial bhiksha Rayu presented himself before the door of his brothers and called out for alms in the Name of God. His brothers were both pained and surprised at the transformation in Rayu. They tried to persuade him to give up the diksha and return to live with them to which he replied: "I am not related to any of you and am no longer yours. I belong to God in future and my life is for His devotion and service." On receiving bhiksha he walked away from the place and came straight to Ramdas at Sitaramrao's house. He accompanied Ramdas to Kasaragod. After a week's stay at Anandrao's Rayu left for Northern India.

The ashram work was getting on apace. When all things were ready, with a few select friends including Kuber Anandrao and Savoor Shankarrao who had come down specially for the occasion, Ramdas proceeded with the singing of God's Name to the ashram. Gurudev, though weak with old age,

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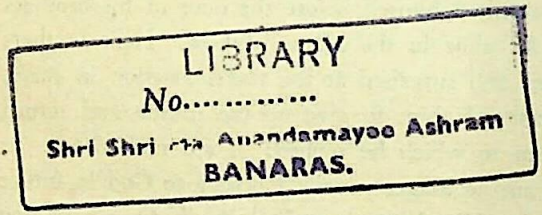
having desired to attend the opening of the ashram, also came. For over an hour bhajan went on and choice songs were sung by some pious mothers. At the close of the function Ramdas spoke on universal vision for about half-an-hour. After distribution of prasad the friends dispersed.



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CHAPTER XLIV

KASARAGOD

The foregoing chapters of this narrative were written some years ago. To bring the narration up-to-date, the account that follows is now appended to it. It is also intended to make this supplement as brief as possible by going over only the most outstanding features of Ramdas' later experiences.

Life at Anandashram, Kasaragod, was also filled with events which are worthy of chronicle. The earlier part of it ran on smoothly except for the crowds of visitors who assembled in the ashram either for performing bhajan or listening to the talks of Ramdas. Then commenced a period marked by celebrations during which the singing of the Lord's Name and glories went on continuously for twenty-four hours attended by hundreds of the devotees of Kasaragod.

Spiritual aspirants, young and old, had recourse to the ashram. Of these, mention may be made of a few who were, as it were, whole-time sadhakas, because they remained in the ashram during the night as well. Ramanath Kini, Kanda, Purnanand and Krishnappa were the principal aspirants. Ramanath Kini was a young man who possessed not only a steadfast devotion to God but also a spirit of dispassion towards the pleasures of the world. Krishnappa was also a remarkably earnest and enthusiastic devotee. Kanda and Purnanand were of advanced age. They devoted their time mostly in taking part in the bhajan and repetition of God's Name. They were one and all exceedingly kind and loving to Ramdas.

Ramdas' daily food which consisted of a small quantity of boiled rice, milk and curry in the afternoon and fruit and

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milk in the night, was provided by Anandrao. Although he lived in a quiet and out-of-the-way retreat, he was kept engaged in talks, correspondence and other activities till late in the night.

Now a few main incidents during his stay in the ashram will be recounted here.

Krishnabai, whose life in some detail has already been written and published in a booklet, visited the ashram in the company of some other ladies. From that time, her attraction for the ashram and Ramdas grew in intensity until at last she dedicated her life to the service of God and became a prominent co-worker with him. Her radiant personality, the selfless and silent service she rendered in the ashram, her pure overflow of love towards all alike, shone out of her and revealed her inherent greatness. She underwent innumerable persecutions when she was thus walking heart and soul along the divine path, but all through it she maintained her cheerful and patient nature untouched and unruffled. Those aspiring souls who came under the influence of her dazzling purity were redeemed.

Rama Bai (Ramdas' daughter by the old birth) with her husband was one of the constant visitors of the ashram. As she imbibed the discourses of Ramdas on devotion, during which he spoke also impressively on vairagya, the girl's mind turned away from the world, awakening in her heart a deep love and longing for God. Thenceforth she appeared to have been caught in the grip of a severe mental struggle. She lost all taste for the things of the world. She curtailed her domestic activities, reduced her food and finally gave up all interest and attachment to her house and became absorbed in God-thought. This state of things naturally frightened her husband and others in the house. Her one cry to Ramdas was: "Make me love God." This state continued for some months. However, after a great deal of persuasion by him she

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came round and lived a normal life, of course without detriment to her love and devotion to God.

About this time, mother Rukma Bai, although she was ailing due to the chronic attack of asthma, came to stay with him at the ashram. The aspirants and devotees and principally Krishnabai served and attended on her with great love and reverence. She bore bravely the discomforts of the ashram life. However, at the pressure of Ramdas, she went back to live with her daughter, coming to stay in the ashram off and on.

Soon after the ashram was started, two young women, school-mistresses of Kasaragod, became regular visitors to the ashram. Both of them were unmarried but they were real spiritual aspirants. Purity and nobility of character shone on their faces. They got instructions from Ramdas regarding the methods for repetition of the Name and meditation. With earnestness and zeal they acted up to these instructions. One day both of them questioned him whether a woman can maintain brahmacharya all her life. Ramdas replied, "Certainly." At this they were highly pleased. They put themselves under strict discipline, started evening bhajan at home, regulated their diet and thus led an austere and chaste life. Blessed mothers! May the light of God ever illumine your hearts and all the ways of your lives!

Through correspondence Ramdas was in touch with innumerable devotees in various parts of India. A year passed away in the ashram and these distant friends longed to see Ramdas again. Letters commenced to pour in from all parts appealing to him to leave the Ashram and start on another tour. Since he had no command from Ram to go from the ashram he stuck on to it. Efforts through correspondence having failed, the friends of Maharashtra deputed Janardan Pant to visit the ashram in person to persuade Ramdas to go over to them under

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his escort. Janardan Pant and Sri Krishna Deshpande arrived. Their advent yielded immense joy to the devotees of Kasaragod. Janardan Pant performed a kirtan at which hundreds of them assembled. But in spite of Janardan Pant's assiduous attempts to induce Ramdas to start with him on a tour, he had to turn down his proposal. He had not at the time the least inclination to respond to his loving invitation. It was all so willed by God. Janardan Pant's disappointment was indeed great, and at the time of his departure he was moved to tears and exclaimed: "What message can I carry to the devotees of Sholapur who are so eager to have your darshan?" Ramdas had nothing to say in reply except to request him to convey to the devotees his appeal, namely, that they should not cease repeating the Lord's Name and feeling that Ramdas was ever with them. Janardan Pant and Sri Krishna Deshpande left.

Among the saints who visited the ashram and gave Ramdas the joy of their satsang were: Swami Pranavanand, Swami Anandashram and Dwarkadas.

Swami Pranavanand, an elderly sannyasi, was a great and noble soul. At the very sight of Ramdas he conceived a love for him which can only be compared to the love of a mother for her child. His stay was very short being only for a day. In the night he would join Ramdas when he danced in ecstasy taking the Lord's Name. The swami, at the request of the devotees of Kasaragod, delivered a discourse at the tennis ground near the Munsif's court. At the swami's pressure Ramdas was made to fill the president's chair. After his discourse Ramdas spoke a few words on the unity of religions.

Shortly after, Swami Anandashram, the spiritual head of the Saraswat community, arrived at Kasaragod and took his residence in the precincts of the Sri Pandurang temple. Of course, the members of the Saraswat community went in large

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numbers for his darshan. At the repeated pressure of a friend among them, Ramdas was also taken over to him for darshan. Ramdas was made to take his seat opposite to him in an arm-chair in a small room on the first-floor of a house. The elite of the community had also assembled at the place. Ramdas duly honouring the swamiji with salutation took his seat. At the first glance he discovered the swamiji to be a pure and great soul. His handsome features radiated the glow of spiritual light. Ramdas felt perfectly free and blissful in his company. Without ceremony Ramdas started recounting to him the incidents of his trip to Kashmir and Amarnath. In a few words he discoursed upon the siddhanta of Kashmiris, that is, of Shiva and Shakti. Soon after, Ramdas, taking leave of the swamiji, returned to the ashram. A few days later, the swamiji in company with his disciples paid a visit to Anandashram. The occasion was characteristic of his broad-mindedness and kind and affable nature. After spending an hour or thereabouts in Ramdas' company, during which Ramdas alone spoke a few words on the value of solitude and satsang, the swamiji left the ashram and went back to the temple.

Dwarkadas' stay in the ashram extended over two months. While he was a devout and pure soul by nature, he was given to smoking ganja. The intoxication of this drug would unsettle his mind and turn him into a violent and irritable man. He carried with him a few small, brass images of God for his daily worship. He was performing the daily worship after bath on the front verandah of the ashram. About this time Mark Sanjivrao was coming to the ashram for the nights.

One day Ramdas was called away at Rama Bai's house for attending their bhajan. In the ashram there were Ramanath Kini, Mark Sanjivrao, Dwarkadas and two other devotees. After the bhajan was over Ramdas returned to the ashram

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about nine o'clock in the night. Meanwhile something had happened in the ashram. Dwarkadas was found to be sitting in a corner with a wry face nursing his knee-joint. The tale came out. When Ramdas was away there was a friendly scuffle between Dwarkadas and Ramanath Kini in the course of which Dwarkadas tumbled down from the verandah, his knee striking hard on the floor of the yard. He was fretting and grumbling over the accident. Ramdas consoled him. It must be related in this connection that Mark Sanjivrao was an early sleeper. He would therefore insist upon all the members in the ashram to go to bed early. So by ten o'clock all retired to sleep. It might have been about eleven o'clock when a loud grunting noise proceeded from the direction of Dwarkadas which awakened the sleepers. Mark Sanjivrao was the first to cry out. Rubbing his eyes he lifted up his head from the pillow and inquired what the row was about. Ramanath Kini from outside enlightened him with the information that Dwarkadas was the cause of the disturbance. Now Ramdas drawing the attention of Dwarkadas asked him what the matter was. He replied:

"I just now remembered my dead father and as a result of it could not help weeping over his separation." Sanjivrao assured him that he would meet him some day and everything would be all right and that he might for the present sleep the matter off. For a time there was a lull and Sanjivrao and others entered again into the depths of sleep. Not many minutes had passed before a piercing yell startled Sanjivrao and others. This time Sanjivrao shot out of bed and going up to the dimly-burning lantern, turned up its light, and, arming himself with it, directly made for the place where Dwarkadas was sleeping. All the time he was muttering: "Let us lay the ghost once for all. The devil is at its tricks again. We shall find out what the matter with him is." He held the lantern before Dwarka-

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das' face and allowing its full glare to fall upon him: "What is wrong with you?" he bellowed. The reply came: "I want to attend the first call of nature."

"Why don't you?" anxiously asked Sanjivrao.

By this time Ramdas was also standing beside Sanjivrao.

"Look here, have you no eyes to see? My knee-joint has swollen and I cannot walk," he replied pointing to his knee, on which there had appeared a protrusion as big as a tennis ball.

Mark Sanjivrao was a man of tact and resource. He called Kanda and Ramanath Kini for help. Dwarkadas, on account of his incessant smoking of ganja, had a lean and emaciated body. Under instructions from Mark Sanjivrao, Kanda and Kini raised Dwarkadas by the armpit, one on each side. He was easily lifted up. Mark Sanjivrao with lantern in hand became the leader. With his usual swinging gait and long strides he walked in front, lantern in hand, and the two friends at the back carried the bent frail figure of Dwarkadas, lifting him right above the ground. Ramdas watched the procession. He was taken near a pond and the business over, in the same style, pomp and circumstance he was carried back to bed. Mark Sanjivrao, after a parting word of advice coupled with a warning and a threat not to make any more horrible noises, retired along with the others to rest.

Purnanand used always to have discussions over religious beliefs and practices with Kanda who was his chum and of the same age. The outer verandah of the ashram had a screen on one side made of palm leaves. The screen was fixed about a foot from the edge of the verandah, leaving a dark gap in between. One day Purnanand sitting on this edge of the verandah was with great enthusiasm exhibiting to Kanda the various modes of asana. In the process his back being turned towards the enclosure he slipped backward and tumbled down the dark gap. His two legs and hands alone were seen shooting.

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outwards. There was a hue and cry. None could resist roaring with laughter at the ludicrous situation into which our yogic aspirant had fallen. Kanda who was a stout and strong man stepped forward, and pulling him out both by the legs and hands put him the question: "What do you call this asana?"

One afternoon Purnanand and Ramdas were alone in the ashram and they were sitting on the verandah. Now Purnanand's son, a young man, dropped in. Coming straight to Ramdas he squatted facing him. He said: "I have come to teach you, if you would condescend to become my disciple." Ramdas replied: "Ramdas is your humblest disciple and would be highly grateful to you if you would teach him." Ramdas awaited his reply in an attitude of perfect humility. All the time Purnanand was fuming with rage at the behaviour of his son, but Ramdas signed to him to keep quiet. The son proceeded:

"You have to know that the world is the manifestation of Ram. He dwells in all beings, creatures and things. This vision you have to attain if you aspire for absolute liberation. Do you understand?"

"Yes, by your grace," Ramdas replied.

Purnanand was restraining himself from dancing with fury, and curbing his tongue from hurling curses on his son. No more questions were asked. There was silence for some time. Then the son spoke again.

"Swamiji, I have a question to ask you."

"What is it, Ramji?" Ramdas said.

"You see, in the nights when I sit up for meditation, my mind wanders. Can you prescribe a method by which I can have steady concentration and meditation?"

"Ram, you are simply wonderful. Have you forgotten that you are the guru of Ramdas who has come to teach him what

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he does not know, viz., about God-realization? Whence is this question about the restless mind and all that? You are veritably Ram Himself."

"No, no," he impatiently cried out, "I am not Ram. I am Ravana. Hit me so that I may behave better." Saying this he laid his head at the feet of Ramdas, and when Ramdas raised him, found that the friend's face was wet with tears. Soon after he left, Ramdas learnt from Purnanand that his son had a bet with his friends in the bazaar that they should stand him a treat in a tiffin shop if he succeeded in making Ramdas angry; and if he failed he would stand them a treat instead. Poor friend, he lost the bet!

Dwarkadas' worship of the images went on regularly day after day. The time of his departure came. The day previous to it he was as usual engaged in his worship having the murtis spread out on a cloth in front of him. Ramdas was at the time sitting on his asan outside. Kanda who was a so-called untouchable, which fact Dwarkadas could know only the day before, came to the ashram as usual but this time with a bunch of ripe plantains as a farewell offering to Dwarkadas. He directly came up and was about to place the gift at the feet of Dwarkadas when the latter suddenly flared up and shouted forth: "How dare you come near me? Don't you see that I have put on the sacred cloth and am doing puja? Get away from my presence." At these sharp words Kanda shrank back and quietly going into a corner took his seat. Ramdas observed the whole game. Getting up from his place Ramdas quietly proceeded towards Dwarkadas, and before he could know why Ramdas was coming to him, collected the images and the puja materials by folding up the cloth on which they were placed and making the whole thing into a sling, with all the force at his command, flung them into the ditch at the right side of the

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ashram. Dwarkadas was stunned, and gazed at Ramdas with looks filled with awe. Ramdas then told him:

"Look here, Ramji, your devotions have been taking decidedly a wrong turn. That devotee before you," pointing to Kanda, "came to you with a heart full of love and reverence and was about to offer you a precious gift of fruits. Now you chose to discard him. That means you have discarded the very love of God. For you in future the living human image should be God. Therefore, get up and prostrate at the feet of Kanda whom you have wantonly insulted. He is your Ram, God and all. This is the vision that you need. Worshipping brass images and conceiving hatred for man is not devotion. Be quick to repair your gross blunder." Instantly Dwarkadas got up and going to Kanda fell at his feet. Thereafter, until he left the ashram he was engaged in repeating God's Name and prostrating before everyone, to whatever caste or creed he or she belonged, who visited the ashram.

The call from the devotees from Maharashtra and Northern India for Ramdas became insistent. At last he could not resist it. Ram gave him the command to go out and fulfil their wishes. Accordingly he wrote to Janardan Pant asking him to come over and fetch him.

The news of Ramdas' intended departure created quite a sensation amongst the adherents of the ashram. Of them Krishnabai was affected most. Till then she was spending her nights with her children in the house in which she resided. Now she insisted that he should permit her to stay in the ashram for the nights. Mother Rukmabai in spite of her ill-health remained in the ashram, but as regards Krishnabai, he was not willing that she should keep away from her children in the nights.

One evening as usual he had to remind her to return to

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her house. In fact she used to be so much absorbed in the service of the ashram that she would entirely forget to mark the passage of time and to leave the ashram even when the darkness of night was closing upon the world. On this occasion she was most reluctant to leave for her house. In so many ways she appealed to him to allow her to remain in the ashram. But in view of her children he could not agree to that. She left.

The following day, about eight o'clock, a cultivator turned up bringing the news that Krishnabai was found lying down in a jungle at the top of the hill near the bhuta sthana, one of her legs swollen and herself partly unconscious. At once Ramdas with some others in the ashram ran up to the place. They found her sitting beneath a tree, her clothes all soiled with mud and earth and one of her legs swollen up to the knee. Ramdas with the help of the friends conveyed her to the ashram. He learnt from her lips that she had spent the night partly in the outer yard of the ashram and partly in the jungle where she was found. The refusal on the part of Ramdas to let her stay in the ashram had deeply affected her. She said she could not return to her home. The swelling was due to a snake bite, but Krishnabai was perfectly calm and her face was as radiant as ever, not a shadow of pain marring it. However, by God's grace, she recovered.

Among the earnest aspirants who visited the ashram was one named Gunda, a native of Puttur. He came on leave from Bombay where he was employed. At the closing period of his leave he came to see Ramdas. A brief talk with Ramdas brought about a far-reaching transformation in him. He at once abandoned the idea of rejoining his post in Bombay and made up his mind to stick to Ramdas. At his request Ramdas initiated him with the Ram-mantram. No sooner did he repeat the mantram for half-an-hour than he was so far carried

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away by the spiritual emotion caused by it that he began to dance in a wild ecstasy. Thereafter he turned his mind and life entirely to the thought of God and service of the ashram. He was a silent man, humble, unobstrusive and assiduous. He was a simple, pure and great soul.

The day for departure arrived. Ramdas left Kasaragod in Janardan Pant's company and the railway platform was fully crowded by the devotees of Kasaragod including Krishnabai, mother Rukmabai and others.

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CHAPTER XLV

BANGALORE—SHOLAPUR

In due course Ramdas and Janardan Pant reached Bangalore and were put up at Bhavanishankerrao's house in Malleswaram. Their stay here was only for a couple of days. At the wish of the devotees in the house Janardan Pant performed a kirtan which was also attended by the people of the neighbourhood. At the time there was in the house a purohit who was called in for some religious ceremony. When Ramdas retired to the room, which he occupied for rest, the purohit came to him and read him a severe lesson. He took him roundly to task for abandoning the householder's life. Ramdas silently swallowed the 'bitter' pill and dismissed the matter with a smile, for explanation and argument with him were found to be of no avail.

Their stay in Bangalore coming to a close they left for Sholapur. At Sholapur station a batch of friends was awaiting their arrival. Govind Ramakrishna Joshi and his son-in-law were among the party. At this time, the annual celebration at Madhavrao Kulkarni's house in Anjangaum was in progress, and it was proposed that Ramdas should first attend this function and then proceed to Uple-Dumala. They were also joined at this place by Prem Singh. The party in due time reached Anjangaum. The celebration at Madhavrao's was then in full swing. Ramdas felt great elation in the company of Madhavrao and other devotees.

Anant Buwa, son-in-law of Govind Ramakrishna Joshi, entertained the assembly with his kirtan, and Ramdas had also to deliver a discourse on bhakti.

From Anjangaum the party consisting of Ramdas, Janardan

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Pant, Prem Singh and two devotees from Uple-Dumala, who had specially come to invite and escort Ramdas, started in bullock-carts. They reached in the evening a small wayside village called Yavli. Remaining here for the night the party, early in the following morning, prosecuted their journey towards Uple-Dumala. The reception which the people of Uple-Dumala accorded to him was simply beyond description. Men, women and children of all castes, creeds and races had with one mind joined hands in making the reception a grand success. He was led through the streets of the village in the midst of a huge procession to the accompaniment of fire-works, bhajan and the Indian band. The devout mothers, the front-yard of whose huts along the path were swept and besmeared with cow-dung and ornamented with rangoli, stood on their doorstep with lights and offerings. The scenes all around manifested the signs of a gala day. Festoons decorated the houses and the roadways. The procession after passing through all the streets of the village at last halted in front of Babarao Kulkarni's house, and Ramdas was taken inside the house where preparations had been made for his stay. The house was filled with the enthusiastic crowd to overflow. The continuous refrain of the divine Ram-mantram rang forth from every one in the assembly. Soon it was followed by dancing. The Muslims of the place also took whole-hearted part in the reception. To the surprise and delight of the Hindu devotees a pious Muslim joined the dancers singing aloud the Ram-mantram. Singing and dancing continued the whole night. The devotees appeared to have forgotten themselves in the ecstasy produced by the melody of the divine Name.

His stay in this village prolonged for about eighteen days. People from the neighbouring villages also came in hundreds to swell the concourse. The divine Name "Ram" issuing from

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the lips of every one in the village surcharged the atmosphere with a tense spiritual fervour.

The programme of bhajan, kirtan, feasts and discourses by Ramdas was worked out in a regular rotation. The devotees poured on him their pure and glorious love in every possible manner. To give a detailed account of the events, during his residence at this place, would be a laborious task. So he puts down here one or two important items.

Among the devotees of the village was a young widow belonging to the shudra caste. From a month previous to his visit to this village, this devout soul had been observing a rigorous fast avowing that she would taste food only after Ramdas had taken a meal prepared by her at her house. The young mother whose name is Anjani mata came to him and invited him for dinner. Meanwhile, the other devotees of the place had already divided up the days of his stay among themselves for the offering of food to him. He now placed the problem before them and pleaded on behalf of the mother. One of the devotees volunteered to forego his turn in favour of Anjani mata. So he had the unique privilege of enjoying the nectarine food prepared by that divine mother.

One day he had an invitation from a Muslim. Ramdas went to his house followed by many brahman devotees. The strangest part of it all was that the faithful Muslim condescended to perform Ramdas' pada puja in the proper style. When the puja was over, the Muslim going inside his small hut brought his long suffering wife out on the verandah where Ramdas sat and making her sit beside him prayed to him to pass his hands over her body. It was evident from the condition of the woman that she was sinking under a slow and continuous fever. She had been reduced almost to a skeleton. As requested by the Muslim, Ramdas passed his hands on her

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head and back and also gave her a part of the milk given to him by her husband. Then he left the place. Some days later when he was away in another village, he came to know that this ailing mother having been cured of her fever in about a week's time was able to help her husband in the fields. All glory be to the great Lord whose will is so powerful and whose ways are so mysterious!

In the evenings Ramdas would run to the bank of the local river and dance in circles in which hundreds of the village devotees joined, singing the divine Ram-mantram. Altogether his stay in Uple-Dumala was marked by the supreme triumph of love in the light of which people of every denomination mingled together in a spirit of perfect equality and brotherhood. Where the love of God manifests there the darkness of conventional distinctions that breed strife and misery disappear. O Lord! victory ever attend Thy Name.

The account of Uple-Dumala cannot be complete without the mention of a few prominent devotees of the place. Raghunath Maharaj, Krishnaji Pandharinath, Bappa Saheb, Babarao Kulkarni and a Gujarati merchant were the outstanding figures who contributed their wholehearted services towards not only the success of the programme but also in planting the seed of the divine Name in the hearts of all the villagers.

At the pressing invitations from the neighbouring villages, Ramdas visited, on leaving Uple-Dumala, Bhatambare, Kaudgaum, Ambe-Jawalage and many other villages. Everywhere thousands of people came to meet him. The so-called untouchable classes freely came forward to touch his feet. Devotion and love rose in floods. The Name of God spread far and wide and the hearts of the people bathed in an ocean of joy. The reception he got in every one of these villages was exactly similar to the one he had while entering Uple-Dumala.

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About this time the annual Kartik festival at Pandharpur was approaching. So, on the suggestion of Janardan Pant and other devotees, Ramdas went with them to Pandharpur for this festival. This time he and the party stayed in a dharmashala. He was made to visit the temples for the darshan of Vithoba. On the last day of his stay he spent a few hours beneath a cluster of tall trees near the banks of the Chandrabhaga river. Here he met all the devotees who had come for the occasion from the various villages he had visited. He received also an invitation from Digambar Kulkarni, a vakil, to his place, Usmanabad. Ramdas promised to fulfil his wish after completing his tour in the Sholapur District.

From Pandharpur Ramdas and party went to Angar via Anjangaum. They had to halt at Anjangaum for a day. There were now a dozen devotees in his company. As usual they were guests of Madhavrao. Here an incident took place which is worthy of note. Madhavrao and the members of his family were overjoyed at his visit and set about making preparations for a fine feast. Meantime, an old relation of Madhavrao in a neighbouring house, was seriously ill. Madhavrao had, of course, his fears because he had intimation early that morning that the condition of the old man was precarious. About nine o'clock news reached the ears of Madhavrao and his household that the old man had passed away. Now Madhavrao was of orthodox belief and practice. According to the orthodox rules, when a near relation dies, the entire family is considered to be polluted by the death, and under such pollution religious functions of any kind are tabooed. Even to touch them or eat food at their hands is held to be irreligious. The sad news at this happy juncture greatly upset Madhavrao. All the work of their preparations suddenly stopped. Madhavrao with a face cast down with regret and disappointment came to Ramdas and apprised him of the unpleasant tidings. In reply he assured

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him that there was nothing wrong. "God would not have your function spoiled. The old man may not have died. Let us wait for further news." Strange as it would appear, a quarter of an hour had not passed after this talk, when a messenger came running to tell Madhavrao that the old man still breathed and the supposition that he had died was wrong. Hearing this Madhavrao's joy can be better imagined than described. Cheer again lighted the faces of the members of his house on whom for a time a shadow had fallen. The preparations went on apace. After dinner Ramdas was taken to see the old man. Although alive he had not clear consciousness of this side of life. After a few minutes Ramdas returned to Madhavrao's. When he was leaving Anjangaum, about four o'clock, by which time the last person in the house had partaken of the feast, news came again that the old man died, and this time once for all.

At Angar Ramdas was received by the devotees of the place with as much love and devotion as on previous occasions. Kirtan, bhajan and feasts were the order of the day. After a short stay here, Ramdas and the party proceeded to Uppalai where again he was welcomed into the modest and sacred hut of Govind Ramakrishna Joshi. Oh! what words can adequately express the overflowing love, simple faith and exalted devotion of this glorious couple, Govind Ramakrishna Joshi and his wife Radhabai! Here again a full programme of bhajan, kirtan and dinner was gone through.

From Uppalai, at the invitation of the Jahagirdar, Raghunath Maharaj Yeshwant, he proceeded to a village called Ashti. It so happened that when Ramdas came to the Jahagirdar's house his wife was in her menses, and as in the custom with the brahmans, during such periods, a lady should observe segregation and should not be touched, as such touch is considered

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to be pollution. The Jahagirdar was in a fix as to the management of the kitchen. With the help of a neighbouring lady he got meals ready for the guests. All the time the Jahagirdar's wife was feeling greatly disappointed that she could not take part in the festivities. Most of all she took to heart that she was losing the opportunity of even touching the feet of Ramdas.

He had, as prearranged, to stay with the Jahagirdar only for a day. The anxious mother appealed to Ramdas through her husband that he should prolong his stay at their place until she passed the period of pollution which is generally three days, but Ramdas could not accede to her wish. So about four o'clock the same day he started. When he came out of the house he saw the mother in a corner of the front-yard. On a sudden prompting from Ram within, Ramdas went up to her and asked her to touch his feet. She hesitated but he assured her there was nothing wrong if she touched him as he was not only her child but the Lord had freed him from all conventional restrictions. The mother responded with a face suffused with delight and laid her head at his feet. The darshan over, he turned towards the friends who were waiting for him. They must have been not a little astonished at this strange act of Ramdas, but they were calm and indulgent.

Mention has to be made that at this place also he came in contact with two Muslim friends who were extremely kind to him.

Passing through various other villages Ramdas with the party came to Khandali. Wamanrao Balwant Kulkarni was as kind as ever in the loving service of his guests. Soon Digambar Kulkarni came here to take Ramdas with him to Usmanabad. They took train to Usmanabad where he remained Digambar Kulkarni's guest. The visit to this town is memorable in many respects. Some of the prominent events relating

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to this visit are chronicled here.

On the second day of his arrival he had invitations from two merchants. He was first taken to the house of one of them in a motor-car followed by a procession and with an English band playing in front. The reception Ramdas received at his house was right royal. Evidently the merchant was a rich man. Ramdas was made to sit on a raised dais, decked and decorated like a throne. As soon as he took his seat the merchant induced him to discard for the time being his plain khaddar cloth and put on instead laced and silk clothes. He besmeared Ramdas' body and face with sandal paste, heaping on him at the same time various costly presents. After partaking of the prasad they had him photographed. When it was time to depart, Ramdas divested himself of the rich robes and redonned his plain khaddar piece. The merchant insisted upon Ramdas' accepting his costly gifts of clothes, etc. Declining the offer with thanks Ramdas said:

"These glittering things are not meant for a wandering fakir like Ramdas; so you have to excuse him for not accepting them."

Ramdas left the merchant's house in company with another merchant who took him to his house where he was treated with similar hospitality.

The house of Digambar Kulkarni became a veritable bhajan mandir. The Name of God resounded within its walls throughout the day and till late in the night. He would sit in a spacious hall in the upper storey of the building whilst all the devotees who assembled there would stand in rows against the walls and sing the Lord's Name in chorus. Digambar Kulkarni took the lead in bhajan. On the day following Ramdas' arrival, a Hindu vakil from the neighbourhood came in and took his seat beside him, and latterly stood up and joining

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the chorus danced with the others. When bhajan stopped and lull was restored, this vakil approaching Ramdas sat down facing him.

"Swamiji," he began, "I greatly wish that you should hear the tale of my conversion. It came about in a wonderful way. In the first place I must tell you that until an hour ago I was a rank sceptic. My house is situated adjoining this. I could hear from there the loud singing going on here. When I heard it and also the thumping on the floor of this storey, I made enquiries as to what the noise was about. I was told that a sadhu had arrived at the house and that the singing and dancing was on account of him. I thought that the people in the house were extremely foolish that they should behave so boisterously simply because some wandering mendicant was present with them. I did not stop merely thinking of their folly but felt a curiosity to see the sadhu who was the cause of so much commotion in the house. I decided to have only a peep at him from the staircase and then turn back. Accordingly I slowly entered the house and went up the staircase to a height from which I could have a good view of the sadhu. I saw, but my mind refused my turning back. I felt an irresistible desire to climb further up and enter the room, and I did. I thought there was no harm to witness the fun. I sat and watched with a queer state of mind the progress of the bhajan. I was tickled to behold stout-bodied educated men jumping and dancing. I could not stop at that. I came to think: 'What does it matter if I repeat the mantram *sotto voce?* Nothing wrong I suppose if I do so', and I commenced muttering the mantram to myself. My hand automatically clapped in a low key. 'What if I stand in a corner just as the others do? I would not bellow forth like them. Repeating merely with the lips will not be detected.' Suiting action to the thought I got up and stood in a far corner in line with

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the others and my lips moved and I uttered the mantram inaudibly. My hands continued clapping. 'If I sing a little louder the sound will be drowned in the chorus, and nobody the wiser and no harm done.' I went on taking the mantram a little louder. All the time my feet were feeling restless. 'What does it matter if I slightly move the feet up and down?' and I did move the feet. So far I was aware of the course of my conduct. What followed next, I confess, is beyond me to say."

The fact was he had danced more wildly than the others, sung more loudly than the others and clapped hands more furiously than done by others.

At the close of his narration a friend in the party whispered into his ears advising him to receive initiation of the mantram from Ramdas. He replied to the friend: "There is no need for it. I know what I am about. The initiation is meant for people like you."

Soon after, the photographer came with a dozen copies of Ramdas' photo taken on the previous day. The assembled devotees eagerly secured a copy each, of whom our vakil friend was one. On getting his copy, this friend, going near Ramdas, took out of his pocket his fountain-pen and handing the photo and the pen to Ramdas requested him to write down on the top of the photo the Ram-mantram. Observing this, the friend who advised him to get initiated roared with laughter and exclaimed:

"There you are. What is this if not initiation?"

"No, no," returned the vakil friend. "I am simply asking him to write down the mantram. That is all."

Another day Ramdas was invited to the local High School where he had not only to speak a few words to the students but also distribute prizes to them.

Two more events that occurred one following closely on

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the other are of utmost significance. One afternoon, about forty persons belonging to the cobbler caste came to pay a visit to Ramdas, passing through the streets in procession singing the Lord's Name to the accompaniment of cymbals, vina and mridang. He received them at the gate of the vakil's house. They considered it no small privilege that they could approach him and touch his feet. Before leaving they expressed a desire that he should attend their congregation to be held in his honour in their locality, at nine o'clock in the night. The same day he had another invitation from the prominent brahmans of the place for a harikatha performance at the Sri Panduranga temple of the town. It was decided that he should proceed to the temple directly, after his visit to the locality of the cobblers had terminated.

About eight in the night a big group of the cobbler devotees came to take him to their place. He passed through the streets in procession joined also by many brahmans of the town and the devotees who had accompanied him, and reached the spot fixed as the trysting place for the people of the cobbler community. Here the gathering that he met was unimaginably vast. He was given a seat in an open shed where the chiefs of the community performed his pada puja. Then commenced the programme of darshan. The process may be compared to the tale of the locusts and the granary. Each man, woman or child of the community was individually presented to Ramdas and, since there were many thousands of them assembled, the function of presentation slowly and regularly continued indefinitely. The brahman friends who had come with him freely mingled in the crowd of the so-called untouchables rubbing shoulders with them. They even accepted the prasad of parched rice distributed by the cobblers. Time flew. The period allotted for the function, which was one hour, exceeded. The crowd around him for a furlong was so

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thick that exit through it was wellnigh impossible. He consulted some of the friends as to the hour of the night and learnt it was eleven o'clock. He was due, as arranged, at the temple at ten o'clock. Where was escape from the crowd when it was increasing in proportion minute after minute? He came to the edge of the verandah which he occupied and saw before him the huge mass of humanity clamouring more and more for darshan. Suddenly he took a leap into their midst, as one from the deck of a boat takes a jump into the ocean, and passed through the crowds like a live wire. He wriggled, jumped, rolled and almost swam through them. At last he reached the road and then flew like wind, but he was not going in the direction of the temple. He visited, at the request of a vakil, his house, and remaining there for a quarter of an hour again raced towards the temple. As he went forward the whole mass of the cobbler community followed him. He reached the temple. A big gas-light was at its entrance and in a vast *pandal* in front of the temple were collected over a thousand people of the higher castes. He directly entered and passed through the crowd. He found them all inside, expecting his arrival. He took his seat on a raised and decorated dais prepared for him. It was indeed a mammoth gathering. As he entered the place the people of the cobbler caste also freely made their way inside and mingled with the brahmans by taking their seat in between them. He was watching from his seat the wonderful work of God which brought a people who were despised as untouchables in close touch with the intolerant brahmans, and that too within a temple. The brahmans turned their faces to each other, stared, winked and whispered. The situation was extremely tense. Ramdas simply smiled witnessing the strange phenomenon before him. Suddenly stillness and silence pervaded the place. As the saying goes, you could hear a pin drop.

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Such was the stillness that came upon the assembled people. On one side was standing the Haridas who was none other than the head-master of the local High School. His opening words were:

"My tongue refuses its function at the sight of this unusually crowded audience. I must declare that I am having vishwarupa darshan. It is practically proved that distinctions of caste, creed and colour are the offspring of utter ignorance. It is the supreme Lord Himself who is manifest as all beings. I am blessed by the sight."

This was all he said and closed his kirtan. These two incidents that took place, close upon one another, really baffle description. What peace and bliss, what freedom can man enjoy when he attains the vision of God in all creatures and things! But, as it is, he is a slave to false traditions that breed hatred and strife between man and man.

Ramdas' stay coming to a close, he and the friends started to depart. A motor-car was engaged to take them to the railway station. The party took their seats in the motor-car which stood at the entrance of Digambar Kulkarni's house. The devotees of the place crowded round the car to bid him farewell. Just when the car was about to start, the vakil friend, the new convert to the path of devotion, hurried through the crowd and opening the door of the car placed his head on Ramdas' feet. After a while Ramdas raised him to find him sobbing like a forlorn child. Gazing on Ramdas he questioned between sobs: "O! Swamiji, when shall I see you again?" The motor-car moved and gathering speed ran on.

Catching the train for Bombay, Ramdas with Janardan Pant travelled towards the great city.

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CHAPTER XLVI

BOMBAY—SOJAT ROAD—KASARAGOD

As usual Ramdas halted at Sanjivrao's house. On this occasion as well he went through a programme set by the friends of the place, almost similar to the one at the time of his last visit to Bombay.

He delivered a discourse in the Saraswat Association Hall, before a crowded audience, on God-realization. Then again he was invited to Santa Cruz where he spoke for a short time on the principles of devotion, after an exposition by Janardan Pant on some portion of the Dasbodh of Samarth Ramdas. At Sanjivrao's, evening bhajan and pravachan on Dasbodh by Janardan Pant became a daily pragramme. Suddenly Anant Buwa also turned up. At Sanjivrao's request he performed a kirtan in his rooms. He was a fine musician and was assisted in his performance by his two sons who were experts in playing upon the harmonium and the tabla. In the course of the harikatha, Anant Buwa gave an apt illustration of the incorrigible human nature which does not allow a person to keep up a steady and unruffled longing and aspiration for God. He said: a mother in the house rocks her child in the cradle and, lulling it to sleep, goes on her task of fetching water from the well. She returns with the pitcher filled and, passing by the way of the cradle, peeps in to see what the child is doing. Finding that it is sound asleep she goes in and empties the pitcher and, when coming out again for another turn, she hears a low cry from the child. Going up to the cradle she gives it a swing and the child sleeps again. Once more she fetches another pitcher of water and finds that the child is a little more restless than before and is crying louder. She goes to the

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cradle and gives one more swing and the child sleeps. Thus swing after swing, the child is lulled to sleep. He concluded: similar is the case of people in the world. They cry for the Lord for a time and then forget everything about Him and one birth is gone; another birth, the child cries again and forgets all about it the next instant. Another birth passes away, so on and so forth *ad infinitum*. Unless and until we cry aloud, fully awake from the sleep of ignorance, we can never dream of freeing ourselves from the cycle of births and deaths and find eternal union with God.

Of the visitors, mention has to be made of one whose name is G. Balasubramaniam. At the very first sight of Ramdas he felt a strange fascination for him. He was then holding a good position as a shorthand typist in a well-known bank of Bombay. He might have sat with Ramdas for not more than five minutes when he said to him in a spontaneous outburst as it were:

"Swamiji, I will go with you. I have determined to follow you in your tours. I shall be your stenographer and will see that your speeches and talks are correctly put down in writing. I am prepared even to go with you to foreign countries." Saying thus he awaited Ramdas' reply. Ramdas looking at him said:

"Ram, are you not married? Haven't you any family at home? What is this you are saying? Do you mean to leave them and follow Ramdas?"

He replied: "I have nothing to do with all that. My one concern is to cast my lot with you." Then Ramdas asked him to consider well over the matter and then come to a decision. The subject was dropped. But he did not forget Ramdas. When dictating these lines to him, Ramdas finds that he has been coming more and more intimately in touch with the

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great mission which God has started through the Ananda-shram of Ramnagar. Verily, God has not been lacking in providing able instruments to further the work of His service for which alone He has enabled him to dedicate his entire life. Ramdas cannot ignore the fact that the Lord Himself in the form of these instruments is fulfilling His own purpose.

During this visit, among the devotees who came into intimate touch with Ramdas besides Sanjivrao and Ratnakar, were also Karnad Gopalrao, Durgashankar Upadhyaya as also Haldipur Narayanrao. Here, Janardan Pant separated from Ramdas as he had to return to Narkhed in Sholapur district.

Hearing of Ramdas' arrival at Bombay, Bhuderbhai and Chhotabhai of Wadhwan came down to take him over to their place.

In Wadhwan, as on the previous occasion, he stayed with Dr. Shukla. The latter and his wife Shantiben bathed him in the streams of their pure love. Bhajan, devotional music by Chhotabhai and talks with the visitors who assembled day after day to listen to the words of Ramdas, comprised the routine. At the request of the headmaster of the place, he delivered a speech in their school hall on universal love, before the students who had assembled for the occasion, and also paid visits to the Bala mandirs.

Ramdas visited Zoravar Nagar where he spent a night in the house of Chunibhai and also paid a visit to the prominent congress leader of Kathiawar, Manilal Kothari, who was at the time ill and bed-ridden. He was delighted to see Ramdas. In the course of conversation he asked Ramdas whether he should continue to take part in politics after recovery. He was much dispirited because Mahatmaji was at the time in jail. He opened the talk with the remark that he wished he had the same free and blissful life which Ramdas was leading. Ramdas

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replied that the work he was doing was great and noble. Worry comes in when any work, political or otherwise, is done from a selfish motive. The secret of liberation in action lies in doing all works without the ego-sense. Here what is demanded of us is perfect self-surrender through dedication of all our actions to the Master-power that controls the universe.

"Oh! how hard it is to be free from the ego and then act. I feel I am simply caught up. I cannot imagine that I could perform action bereft of the ego-sense. It is so hard," he said.

"Nothing is hard provided you strive whole-heartedly to attain the end in view. It is quite possible to live and act as a free instrument in the hands of the Almighty," Ramdas rejoined.

"You may be right—nay, you are right, but for myself such a state is not within the realm of possibility. However, I shall not forget you. Some day I shall make you come to me again; if not I shall go to you. Now a link is formed between us which nothing can snap," he spoke with vehemence.

"The link is there always. We are eternally united. We are eternally one. Realize this." Saying thus Ramdas took leave of him after partaking of some refreshments.

In Wadhwan Ramdasanudas came all the way from Northern India to meet Ramdas. On account of some malady his sight was very weak. However, he stuck on to Ramdas for over a month during his tour in Kathiawar.

From Wadhwan Ramdas proceeded to Limbdi. In Limbdi he met the old friends Raja Ram and mother Elizabeth and a host of others. The same programme as on the last occasion was gone through.

At the instance of mother Elizabeth, Ramdas was called

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upon to deliver a discourse in the State High School on universal love. In the hall, besides a large gathering of students, were also seated near Ramdas, mother Elizabeth, a European missionary and Pratap Singh. He spoke for about three quarters of an hour on the universal nature of love, a subject which was so dear to him. He said in the course of the speech that human life attains its highest perfection only when it is gifted with the vision that sees the one eternal Life principle, pervading throughout the universe and dwelling in the hearts of all creatures and things. The animation and activity inherent in all the objects of creation have their inception in the basic Truth underlying the entire manifested universe. At the conclusion of the discourse, he cited instances from the teachings of the great incarnations of the world in support of his statement:

"Buddha, Krishna, Mahavira and Mohammed, all stood for universal love and their messages insistently proclaimed that the supreme nature of the ultimate reality or God is love. To realize love and make it an active power in us, it is essential that our heart should dazzle with purity and intellect be enlightened with wisdom. Unless these conditions are fulfilled none can enter that kingdom of immortality which would bring him face to face with the supreme Deity who is eternal splendour and all-inclusive Love."

When the speech ended the Christian missionary congratulated Ramdas on his speech, but reminded him that he had made a grievous omission in not mentioning Jesus Christ in the same breath as the other incarnations. Ramdas assured the missionary that although he had failed to refer to Christ, he held Christ in the highest reverence, and understood him as an exalted example in whom is revealed the highest glory of universal love.

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A little later he again had an opportunity to meet the kind missionary at his bungalow. It was evident that the missionary was a great lover of Christ. He asked Ramdas: "Why don't you follow Christ?"

Ramdas replied: "Ramdas has enthroned Christ in his own heart and ever feels his union with the great Teacher whereas you seem to believe that Christ is an outside ideal to hold communion with, as a person apart from you. Christ is truly the Lord of our life, soul and body. Does he not say 'The Kingdom of God is within you'? Verily God or Christ is ever with us."

The day of his departure from Limbdi was fixed, but Raja Ram and mother Elizabeth pressed him to postpone it for a day later, for the next day Raja Ram would start Bhagavat saptaha at his palace in memory of his late Rani saheb. Ramdas agreed to be present at this religious function only for the first day. The saptaha continues for seven days. So on the opening day of the saptaha he sat for a few hours in the midst of the devotees who assembled to listen to the reading of Srimad Bhagavat by an aged Pandit of the State. The succeeding day he departed from the place.

In company with Dr. Shukla and Popatbhai, Ramdas visited a distant village called Dhanduka. Mother Rewaben, the headmistress of the school, had invited him to her place. She had paid a visit to him with this purpose at Wadhwan. He spent a day under her hospitable roof.

From Dhanduka he and the party made directly for Rajkot via Wadhwan. He had only two companions with him during this visit, Popatbhai and Ramdasanudas. At Rajkot he met Madhavram Raval, a pure and devout soul. This young man had spent the early period of his life in the ashram of a famous saint, Sri Nathuram Sharma, undergoing strict spiritual

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discipline. He was now in Rajkot in the employ of the State. Ramdas and the friends with him occupied the Travellers' Bungalow. The devotional temperament of Madhavram would reveal itself whenever he sang bhajan and got into moods of ecstasy. On the following day the party left Rajkot and as planned, reached Veraval in due time. From Veraval they travelled by taxi to Una where Maganlal was living.

During this visit he and the friends resided in a newly built hospital ward near the quarters of Dr. Mahadevia. The friends of the place treated him, as on the last occasion, with great love and hospitality. A few days after their stay, there took place a riot between Hindus and Mohammedans in which many, on both sides, received severe injuries. The friction between these communities, breaking out off and on in several parts of India, has been creating a perplexing and grievous problem for the leaders of both the communities to tackle with. What is needed on the part of both is an attitude of respect for each other's faith. Both the Muslims and the Hindus have at their back equally brilliant traditions, and that they should fight each other exhibits their ignorance or wilful forgetfulness of their glorious past.

After a week's stay Ramdas and Popatbhai took leave of the friends and travelled towards Wadhwan again. As Dr. Mahadevia desired that Ramdasanudas should continue to remain with him for the treatment of his eye-disease, he decided to stay behind.

Duly reaching Wadhwan, Ramdas with Dr. Shukla came to Ahmedabad.

On the way to Ahmedabad they alighted at a wayside station where they went for the darshan of a Jain saint in an ashram which was said to have been occupied, at one time, by a famous saint, known as Mustram. It appears that the saint

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originally belonged to the European community.

In due course they reached Ahmedabad where they stayed with Dr. Shukla's brother. Here many friends of the place came to see Ramdas. Except that he reprimanded in strong terms an educated man, holding an academic degree, for his gratuitous attack on saints in general, there was nothing worthy of note.

From Ahmedabad Ramdas travelled towards Sojat Road where Dr. Raval lived. On his way by train at the Abu Road station, a Gujarati devotee pressed him to break his journey. He spent a blissful night in the company of this friend and the pious members of his household. It has been very often expressed by householders that it is next to impossible to live a life of utter devotion to God in the midst of the world. This statement was falsified so far as the household of this Gujarati friend was concerned. All members of the family lived, moved and had their being in absolute remembrance of God. Calmness and peace ever prevailed in the house. The friend was a pure man eking out his bare subsistence from the income derived from a petty job. Even kings and potentates might well envy his contentment. He was so pure, simple and loving. Life is indeed blessed when it is lived in the spirit in which this young man lived.

The following day Ramdas prosecuted his journey and the Gujarati friend travelled with him for some stations and then returned. Ramdas reached Sojat Road where Dr. Raval was eagerly waiting for him. Here he spent a few quiet days. One evening Raval took him out for a stroll to a distant railway bridge. They sat down on a selected spot. In the course of the talk that ensued Ramdas expounded three main principles that should guide the conduct of a human being. (1) Right food; (2) Right action; and (3) Right society.

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"Right food consists of such food as is free from the ingredients that cause irritation in the body and the mind. Satwic diet comes under this head. What is to be avoided in regard to food is the food that would set the mind in a whirl of desires and cause disease in the body. This comes under the name of rajasic, i.e., fiery, and tamasik, i.e., stale food.

*"Right action is that action in which the idea of the self is totally absent. Here the consideration of ahimsa or himsa does not apply. Any action performed with the object of attaining a selfish aim should be avoided, be it of the nature of himsa or ahimsa. Therefore, selfless action is right action and selfish action is wrong action.

"Society: That society in which you feel that you are elevated, in which the mind is purified or even drawn inwards and you come by the peace of the Eternal, is right society; be the person, with whom you associate, of a lower or higher caste, or a western or eastern nationality. Avoid the company of those people by whose contact your mind is defiled and your senses go out of control, even though they happen to belong to the highest caste or race. Associate with the pure and eschew the company of the impure. This should be held as the standard which is ever true without regard to any other considerations."

After a brief stay with Raval he caught the train for Agra. He travelled, of course, by third class. After passing some

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Sanskrit rendering by S. K., 22-9-37:—

*साधु कर्म किमित्यत्र निश्चयं कृतवान् प्रभुः।
अहंकारकृतं दुष्टं ; हिंसाऽहिंसे न लिम्पतः॥
स्वार्थहेतोः कृतं त्याज्यं, हिंसाऽहिंसापि वाऽस्तु तत्।
तस्मादहन्ताहीनं सद्, असन्नूनमहंकृतं॥

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stations Raja Ram, i.e., Thakore Saheb of Limbdi, who was also travelling by the same train in his special saloon, came to know that he was in the train. He approached Ramdas and persuaded him to occupy his car, at least as far as a certain junction where the trains were changed. Raja Ram was on his way to Delhi. There was a small compartment in the saloon-car fully equipped, which was used by mother Elizabeth when she also travelled with Raja Ram. Ramdas occupied this compartment. Before doing so he talked for some time with Raja Ram on the greatness of universal vision. The unexpected meeting proved to be highly blissful. At the junction Ramdas separated from Raja Ram and returned to the third class carriage.

Having been informed of his coming, Ramchandra Gupta was waiting at the station to receive him. He took Ramdas to the city and made him occupy a small, newly built dharmashala in the precincts of a temple. Here he met many devotees and friends of the place.

It is common knowledge that the Taj Mahal of Agra is a world-famous building. Ramdas in the company of Ramchandra Gupta went to see this fascinating structure. Many a poet and writer of imagination has lavished his genius in describing the charming beauty of the Taj Mahal. It is rightly said by one of them that the Taj Mahal is 'a dream in marble.' It is erected in memory of Mumtaz, wife of Shah Jehan. The mausoleum exhibits the exquisite art of Moghul architecture. To fully describe it here would cover pages. He entered the Taj Mahal and witnessed the designs and carvings on the walls and the dome in the centre of the building. Next coming out he ascended one of the four minarets and remained at the top, a spectator of the vast scenery all around and the Jumna river flowing close at the back of the mausoleum. Beautiful gardens with rectangular water reservoirs, facing the building,

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were laid out to heighten the enchantment of the place.

The next place he visited was the huge fort of Agra. His sight was charmed with the innumerable Mahals on which also the sculptor had exhausted his rare skill and unremitting labour. They are also of the Moghul type. When they were returning from the fort they met outside a huge crowd of locusts settling down on the plain, in front of the fort. These creatures, as everbody knows, are the most dangerous pests that feed upon the crops and devastate the land upon which they choose to alight.

Having received a call from Jhansi, Ramdas went down to the place. The friends of Jhansi, especially Mahadev Prasad, were keenly looking for his arrival and on seeing him went into ecstasies through sheer joy. This time he resided in a kuti, far away from the city, lying on the way to the railway station. He had the unexpected delight of meeting again Swami Ramanand from whose kind surveillance he had slipped away at Pilikoti Ashram. He also evinced unfeigned delight on seeing Ramdas. On the following day Swami Ramanand left the place and Ramdas became the sole occupant of the kuti. All the old friends of Jhansi gave him the joy of their company. Mahadev Prasad remained with him day and night.

Then for about two or three days he was taken out of Jhansi by Triveni Prasad on a visit to Lalitpur and Trikamghar, an Indian State. Later he also visited Mahoba, Konch and Jalgaon in the course of which he met Jagannath, Bankeylal Gupta and Ganesh Bajpai.

Not a week had passed in Jhansi, when a letter from Ramabai at Kasaragod was received by him intimating that Gurudev had expressed a desire to see him, and Ramabai proposed that he should not delay in fulfilling Gurudev's wish. He did not know what to do. He felt that he could not go

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back to Kasaragod before he had completed his all-India tour. However, when Triveni Prasad, who was looking after Ramdas in every way, was consulted in the matter, he emphatically suggested that he should respond to the call. He stated that there was no time to lose and Ramdas ought to start that very day. He agreed. Triveni Prasad took him to the Jhansi station and, procuring for him a through ticket to Kasaragod, saw him seated in the night train bound for Madras. Ramdas found himself tearing along towards the south for the darshan of Gurudev. Duly he reached Madras where he stayed with Dr. G. S. Katre, in Mylapore. Next day he caught the Mangalore mail and reached Kasaragod. Alighting he directly went up to Anandrao's house for the darshan of Gurudev. Gurudev was highly pleased to see him. He was at the time almost bed-ridden. Soon after, Ramdas proceeded to Anandashram. Krishnabai was looking forward to his coming like the proverbial chatak. As in the past she commenced visiting the ashram and rendered him her loving service.

The question arose as to whether he would again travel to the north for completing the original programme. He himself was not certain of the future plans. About ten days later Janardan Pant, hearing of Ramdas' return to Anandashram, suddenly turned up. He had now availed himself of a sufficiently long leave to go with Ramdas on his visit to various Northern India cities in response to the invitation of friends of those places. He was eager to see the Punjab and Kashmir. So he suggested that Ramdas should start again for the North and that he would keep him company. Ramdas agreed with him. Once more there was a flutter amongst Kasaragod devotees. They laid all the responsibility for this tour on the shoulders of Janardan Pant and roundly took him to task for it. This attack on him was the first of its kind, as he had to face worse music in the course of his travels with Ramdas.

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CHAPTER XLVII

RAWALPINDI—KASARAGOD

Ramdas on the day fixed departed from Kasaragod again for Northern India with Janardan Pant. Reaching Madras and again staying with Dr. G. S. Katre for a day, they entrained for Nagpur. At Nagpur they remained for two days with Kalle Sadashivrao. Then travelling further north they arrived once more at Jhansi. This time he stayed here for about ten days. Here he met also Swami Nirbhayanand and Purnanand.

On the due date Ramdas departed with Janardan Pant straight for Rawalpindi. In Rawalpindi he was as usual put up at Pandit Jewandas'. His halt was short. He was eager to finish off the Kashmir trip and then, on return, spend a few days in Rawalpindi. So in three or four days he and Janardan Pant found themselves under the hospitable roof of Pandit Janakinath. Janakinath and his family were as before all love and kindness. Pandit Amarnath was also there at the time. His stay in Srinagar this time was only for ten days. Here a word about Janardan Pant would not be out of place. He expected that by keeping company with Ramdas he would have a happy time of it, but his experience was quite the reverse. His ignorance of the English language was for him a great handicap. Ramdas conversed with the friends, at every place he visited, in English. Besides, being nurtured and bred in the orthodox atmosphere, Janardan Pant found the ways of the people, in the midst of whom he was forced to live, strangely unpalatable. He had come to Srinagar expecting to see in that land of Pandits an ideal state of things. But his disillusionment must have been shocking. The stinking air of the

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city and the ill-ventilated mud houses of the Pandits, and the meat-eating and untidy habits of the people were things he had not bargained for. When visiting the Shalimar and Nishad gardens the party had to pass through a canal on a canoe manned by Muhammadans. The nauseating stench of the canal was too much for Pant. Ramdas could very well make out when he noticed the facial contortions of Pant, while he was sniffing at the trying odour of the canal, that he must have been deeply repenting the false step he took in coming to Srinagar. To top it all, when Ramdas proposed to the Pandits after a week's stay that he must be permitted to leave Srinagar shortly, they all but tore Pant to pieces, presuming that he was at the bottom of Ramdas' early departure from their midst.

Before leaving the place Ramdas and Pant remained with Shambhunath for a few days. One night Janakinath came here to see Ramdas. He took him out for a walk to a maidan close by. As they walked Janakinath had a long talk with him. The gist of it was that Ramdas by a mere wish should bring him face to face with God. If self-surrender was the goal he should see that Janakinath attained it by a mere blessing from him. In reply Ramdas made him understand: "Self-surrender is a task mainly resting upon the efforts of the sadhaka or the devotee. God wants us to be conscious instruments in His hands. God's grace alights on the devotee when he has acquired the necessary qualifications for it."

Janakinath would not agree. He stated that he was perfectly weak and powerless and could not do the necessary sadhana for bringing about the needed surrender. Everything must be done for him by God Himself. If there was to be surrender, God alone should see that He provided him with the conditions for such a surrender. In short, he looked to God to shower on him all that was best that lay in His power

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to grant.

To this Ramdas said: "Since you know the truth that God alone is the real power and the only power that should mould your life, bringing about a divine transformation, then where is the question of attaining self-surrender? You have already realized the Truth. Your worry and fretfulness have no significance. In so far as you are manifesting these feelings, Ramdas takes it that you do so for mere play."

He would not be convinced. The talk went on till late in the night. It appeared, after all, that Janakinath meant by his talk nothing more than a loving pastime.

When the appointed day arrived Ramdas left the hills of Srinagar for the plains. Of course he came down to Rawalpindi again. Here again he met Swami Anand Swarup who dwelt in a solitary house removed from the city. Ramdas was paying him visits every evening, and at his rooms devotees of all sects would assemble to listen to his talks.

One day a Sikh devotee who was greatly taken up with Ramdas—a daily visitor—read out a few verses from Guru Arjun Dev's Sukhmani, and explained the meaning to the assembled party. Guru Arjun Dev has propounded that man comes by the highest beatitude of life, viz., spiritual illumination, only through the grace of saints. He held that no sadhana or tapasya, even of the most severe type, could entitle the sadhaka to the attainment of this supreme state. The saint chooses to throw the light of his grace on any man who comes in touch with him and that instant the fortunate soul attains moksha. There is no such condition as fitness or otherwise of the aspirant to receive or not to receive the saint's grace. He rightly contends that if divine grace depended upon the condition of the aspirant, it cannot be all-powerful. Since it is all-powerful, no qualification of any kind for an aspirant is

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necessary for the reception of the divine grace. He concluded that the absolute power of grace rests entirely with the saint. Whomsoever he chooses, he elevates, blesses and liberates. This is the incontrovertible law of grace.

Another time, at the request of some friends, he went for the darshan of a sannyasi, residing in the house of one of them. A party consisting of Swami Anand Swarup, Jewandas and two or three others, visited the house. The sannyasi was all humility and treated Ramdas with great kindness and love. Ramdas seated himself beside him and the other friends also did the same. In the course of conversation the saint, who appeared to have a large number of disciples in Rawalpindi and other places, and whose practice of yoga was the Raja yoga of Patanjali, put to Ramdas the question: "What do you prescribe as the best method for control of mind?"

Ramdas replied: "So far as his experience goes he can assert that the continuous repetition of the divine Name can easily produce concentration of mind."

"Before I proceed to express my opinion on the solution you have offered, I will lay before you a bit of my own experience," the sannyasi continued. "I have been for many years struggling hard to bring under subjection the restless activity of the mind. I have adopted the method of ashtanga yoga. I regulated my food according to the strict rules of satwic diet. For some months I lived all alone on the banks of the Ganges far beyond Rishikesh. I worked on at the practice systematically throughout the period of my stay there. Even with all my strenuous endeavours I found I could not attain any measure of concentration. I then felt so depressed and despaired of success and disgusted with life that I thought of committing suicide by jumping into the river. Somehow I resisted this impulse and I am here with this question which sorely troubles

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me day and night. But I fail to see that the method prescribed by you can be of any avail. I do not believe in it. This is my candid and considered opinion."

To this Ramdas said: "Swamiji, you seem to be quite arbitrary in rejecting a method, which Ramdas holds forth as most conducive to attaining concentration, without your giving a fair trial to it. Ramdas spoke to you about the power of the divine Name not from mere hearsay or taking the hint from books. You may depend upon it he speaks upon this subject on the authority of his own experience. Since you desired to know, Ramdas gave his solution to your problem."

"I have no faith in the path of bhakti," he replied. "I do not believe in sentimental religion. I have no patience with those who say that devotion and taking of the Lord's Name leads one to God-realization. I have not found the path for myself, but I know bhakti is not the way."

When the sannyasi came to this definite and final conclusion, Swami Anand Swarup, who was so long calmly listening to the dialogue, was roused at the closing words of the sadhu. In an indignant tone he rated the sannyasi as follows:

"Then what business had you to raise the question at all? Having raised it in the spirit of a learner you ought to have accepted the advice couched in the reply. You are combating it without possessing the least knowledge of the matter. Swamiji has conclusively solved your problem. It is of course for you to take it or not, but you should not have peremptorily condemned it. You are asked to give a trial to the method placed before you. However that be, it is clear from your own confession that you have woefully failed in the path chosen by you. Still the wonder is that you pose yourself as a guru and canvas a number of disciples. What are you going to teach them? Evidently to drown themselves in the Ganges river!

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Why do you impose yourself upon harmless people and, living in their houses, feed upon them? You are strong enough to work for your food. Divest yourself of the misleading ochre-robes that you have donned to fool the world. Be honest and remain true to yourself and save thereby many a gullible soul from being led on a path which will take them nowhere. This is my advice to you. Follow it and be wise."

The sannyasi, whom Ramdas was watching when Swami Anand Swarup was taking him to task, had all the time his face lit up with a self-complacent smile. He was unruffled and cool as cucumber. Turning towards Swami Anand Swarup, in a low, gentle and modulated voice, he spoke:

"Swamiji, the irritable nature that you have exhibited does not become your garb. You have unnecessarily wasted a good deal of your precious energy in the ebullition of anger. I am a humble soul and you are a great mahatma. I am not sorry for myself, but I regret that I became an unintentional cause of the violence you did to yourself."

After this there was a lull and, the meeting having terminated, Ramdas stepped out of the house with the other friends. The sannyasi came out on the road to bid the party farewell and Ramdas could not resist clasping him in a fond embrace at which Swami Anand Swarup must have been not a little surprised.

Another day, at the combined wish of the devout mothers of the city, he delivered a discourse on Krishna Prem in a religious institution. There were over two hundred ladies present on the occasion and it was purely a ladies' gathering. He spoke in Hindi for about one hour. He poured himself out in a stream of ecstasy on the sublime nature of Love. He brought out many telling incidents in the life of Lord Krishna

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wherein the Lord's love for His devotees was revealed in all its magnificent glory. He concluded with the peroration that Lord Krishna was the very personification of infinite love, light and joy.

The mothers, who listened to his discourse with rapt attention, were supremely happy. They were the votaries of Lord Krishna who was their life, soul and everything. Blessed mothers, may you ever be inebriated with the magic spell of Lord Krishna's Name and Love!

The discourse over, he returned to Jewandas' house. He was seated on the terrace of the building. He heard from there a spirited talk going on at the entrance of the house below. It ceased, and a friend apprised him about the persons engaged in the talk at the entrance. It appeared, two members of the detective police attended Ramdas' discourse that day and followed him up to Jewandas' house. The fact was, Ramdas was wearing a khadi cloth and Janardan Pant, besides being dressed in khadi, was also wearing a khadi white cap. The detectives thought that Ramdas was a politician in the garb of a sannyasi. Since they found nothing incriminatory in his discourse they came as far as the house to inquire after his antecedents, mission, etc. They went away after receiving satisfactory information from Jewandas' wife.

In the course of his stay in the Punjab he was taken by Jewandas on a short trip to his native village Hazro, where Ramdas came in contact with many devotees of the place, including a Muslim holding broad views. Here he cannot fail to mention that he received kindness and hospitality from many devotees in Rawalpindi at their houses, of whom Gurudas Ram and a Sikh Sardar were two.

Soon after he returned to Rawalpindi, he departed for Agra. In due time he reached Agra where again he and

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Janardan Pant were lodged in the outhouse of the temple. During this stay Ramdas gave a discourse in the vaishya boarding house. The young men of the house put him various questions and he elucidated their difficulties, drawing upon his own life and experience. They were all of good cheer and treated him with great love.

Among the friends who paid him visits in the temple were two from Etawah, Suraj Narayan and Hridaya Narayan. They took him with them on a visit to Etawah where they accommodated him in the local Theosophical Lodge. Many friends of this place, here as well, crowded at the lodge in the evenings to listen to his discourses. He had, as in other places, a blissful time of it.

From here he was escorted by Hridaya Narayan to Mainpuri where his parents lived. He was welcomed with great joy by all the members of the household and he spent a delightful night in their pure and loving company. Dharm Narayan, father of Hridaya Narayan, was a great and noble soul, and his talented sons had inherited the sterling qualities of the father. Again returning to Etawah, he and Janardan Pant left the city straight for Dhanbad, passing on the way Benares and Allahabad..

At Dhanbad the Gujarati friend, Ratilal, was awaiting his arrival at the station. Ratilal lived far in the interior in Katrasgarh, a noted coal mine district in Bengal. The party with Ratilal motored from the station to Katrasgarh. Ramdas remained here for about a week. At this time he availed himself of the opportunity of visiting the coal mines. A small occurrence at this place deserves notice. The time was when picketing was the rage. Young school-boys were taking keen interest and active part in this movement. A lad of the house proved to be an intrepid picket. It appeared he was arrested

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by the police for picketing a liquor shop. As customary the policeman questioned him:

"Who is your father?"

"Mahatma Gandhi."

"Where is your home? was the policeman's next question.

"Jail," was the prompt reply of the boy.

At this, the boy was set free and sent home.

After a week's stay in Katrasgarh he and Janardan Pant proceeded to Calcutta where they stopped with Parab and B. S. Rao. These two friends divided between them the earlier part of his stay in Calcutta, since they lived in the same building. At nights on Saturdays these friends with some others of their society would repair to the terrace of the building and spend the whole night awake in their own mode of meditation and spiritual discourses in which Ramdas once joined them. Both the friends were overflowing in their kindness to these itinerant guests.

Then he with Janardan Pant spent a few days with P. Shivshankerrao at whose house Janardan Pant performed a harikatha, largely attended by the interested public of the place. Another harikatha performance was also arranged in a bhajan mandir belonging to the resident Maharashtra community of the city. Here Janardan Pant had for his subject Sri Samarth Ramdas and Shivaji. In the course of his discourse his fiery nationalist spirit, which had been for a long time suppressed after coming into close contact with Ramdas, was roused. He spoke with great vehemence about the fallen condition of India and passed a scathing judgment upon those whom he held responsible for it. For some time past, after he severed his connection with political activities in which he was engaged when Ramdas first met him, he was mainly a religious preacher. The people assembled for his kirtan were

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not prepared for this digression on his part at which they must have been not a little perturbed. Realizing the situation Janardan Pant returned at once to the main theme of the performance. Ramdas' stay in Calcutta continued for about ten days during which he received nothing but kindness and love from all friends of the place.

The next move was directly for Madras, and after a couple of days' journey by railway they reached the city for the third time. On this occasion the stay with Dr. G. S. Katre extended over a week. Here also Janardan Pant had an opportunity to perform a kirtan at the request of the friends of that city.

From Madras they travelled to Kumbakonam. Savoor Shanker Rao, the friend who has so kindly written an introduction to this book, had come to Madras to take him over to his place. Savoor Shanker Rao is a vastly learned man. In his spacious bungalow, of which the big drawing room was his library, where he had a very fine collection of books dealing with philosophy, religion and general literature, Ramdas spent a week most blissfully. His wife, a simple, child-like and noble soul, joined heartily with her husband in the bhajan that was held in the evenings. Ramdas hardly moved out of the house. Some professors of the college, of which Savoor Shanker Rao was the then principal, came to see Ramdas and had talks with him. Here Janardan Pant, whose leave had by now expired, separated from him and returned to join his duties at Narkhed.

Ramdas' next place of visit was Ernakulam. Here he spent a few days in the company of P. Sanjivrao and many other friends of the place and then left for Kasaragod again. Of course, he occupied once more Anandashram, situated in that calm retreat beyond the hills.

The usual routine of the ashram life restarted. Krishnabai paid her daily visits and did her selfless service in the

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ashram. A week after his arrival, Krishnabai's brother-in-law, having returned from Europe, came to Kasaragod to take over his family and Krishnabai and her children to Dharwar. Really, it was a wrench for Krishnabai so suddenly to tear herself off from her association with Ramdas and the ashram. At his request, she however departed with her brother-in-law and others.

Before proceeding to narrate the events that followed, it is necessary that a word should be said relating to the intense life of self-sacrifice Krishnabai led during his all-India tour. Gurudev was bed-ridden and Rukmabai, owing to her severe attacks of asthma, was also in a similar condition. In those days Krishnabai's life was mainly spent in attending on the patients. As a nurse at the bedside of a sick person she can be said to be rarely equalled. She would give herself away for such service heart and soul. She tended both the patients a thousand times more tenderly and carefully than their own mothers would have. For the matter of that, her entire life is an oblation to the selfless service of all, irrespective of condition, person, time or place.

With regard to the service rendered to the abovementioned patients, Ramdas heard from their own lips their deeply grateful and loving words of thanks to her and praise of Krishnabai's divine nature.

Another fact which cannot go unnoticed is that Gunda, a great and selfless devotee, true to Ramdas' request, remained in the ashram mostly alone, all the time that Ramdas was away from it. He now became Ramdas' whole-time attendant. After returning from the tour Ramdas scarcely left the ashram for the town, and gradually the number of visitors also dwindled away, until for the last few months of his stay, he was singularly alone in the ashram except for this loving and

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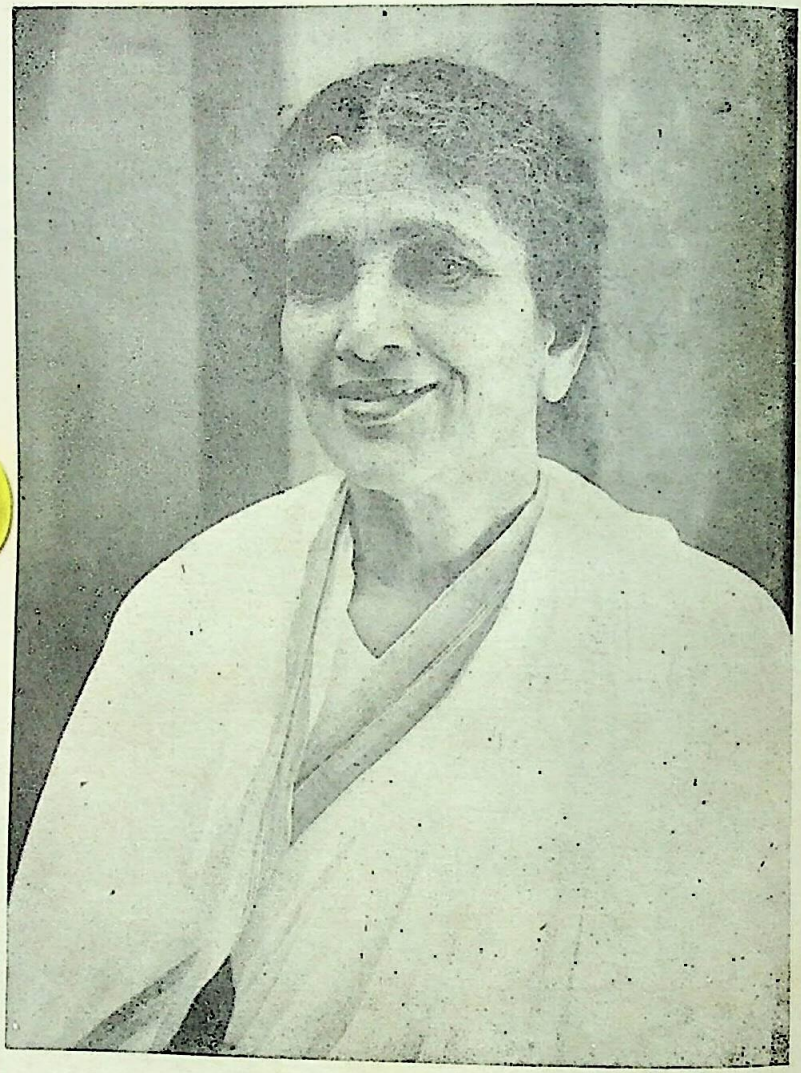

Mother Krishnabai

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faithful friend.

About two months having thus passed, under peculiar conditions which are not worthwhile narrating here in detail, as bid by Ram, Ramdas went on a month's fast and a vow of silence. Of course, he was living on a moderate diet of milk. About this time he also got an anonymous letter threatening his life, if he did not abandon the ashram at once. A fortnight after the beginning of the fast, Vidyacharya, a friend from Sholapur, came down to see him. Vidyacharya was naturally disappointed that he could not freely discourse with Ramdas. Also he was much pained at the scanty diet on which Ramdas was then living. One night, it might have been between eight and nine o'clock, Ramdas, Vidyacharya and Gunda were sitting on the outer verandah with a lantern burning in their midst. Vidyacharya and Gunda were deeply absorbed in singing devotional songs. Suddenly, without any notice, Krishnabai made her appearance. Ramdas wrote on a slip of paper and showed it to her: "After all, you have come," and also enquired in it if she came alone. He also wrote in the note: "Mother, you have come to your own home. The Ashram shall in future be your permanent place of residence." Most of the way from Bombay, where she had gone from Dharwar, she had travelled alone with a single cloth and nothing besides. Thereafter, she stayed in the Ashram day and night. Vidyacharya left and Gunda also went to Puttur, his native village, for a change.

Under instructions from Ramdas, Krishnabai now started on a course of steady and continuous discipline in meditation and asana. On his advice she also visited every day four or five houses of devotees in the town where she gave the benefit of her presence and service to the devout ladies of the household. Meanwhile his fast for one month came to a close, but as he was not satisfied with it, he went on a further fast for three days, taking only water. Then again, he proposed to go

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even without water. This last absolute fast was observed only for one day and he had to break it due to the most pathetic appeal from Chandrashekarrao, Ramabai's spouse. Thenceforth he came to his old diet of one meal a day. Now Ramdas and Krishnabai used to be alone in the ashram in the nights.

A fortnight after the breaking of the fast, when Ramdas was busy taking a fair copy of the earlier chapters of this book, and Krishnabai sitting as usual in her posture of meditation on the verandah where she slept for the night, a man of a coarse appearance but of strong build, belonging to the working class, turned up with a lantern in hand. The time must have been about 10 p.m. Ramdas came out leaving his work and enquired of the visitor what he wanted. He replied: "Some friends possibly from a distant place have arrived at the bungalow on the top of the hill and have sent word through me to ask you to go there to meet them."

Ramdas' heart, when he heard this, overflowed with love and he said within himself: "At what a great sacrifice these friends must have come from a long distance out of their pure longing and love for Ramdas!" At once he made up his mind to go up to them. The messenger said that he would remain in the ashram until Ramdas returned. Taking the lantern of the ashram he started, asking Krishnabai to wait until he returned with the friends, but she said she would also like to go with him. The sturdy messenger also falling in with Krishnabai's idea said that she might also accompany him. So both walked quickly up the hill and reached the travellers' bungalow, but to their surprise and discomposure they found that there was nobody waiting for them in the bungalow. Ramdas at once scented some mischief, for the messenger had deliberately remained behind in the ashram during their absence.

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Now both quickly retraced their steps to the ashram. On reaching the place they found that the messenger with his lantern had disappeared. On going up the verandah they further saw a quantity of nightsoil splashed at the entrance of the room and a number of pieces of a broken earthen pot. This was the work of the nocturnal visitor for discharging which alone he must have come. Without feeling the least repugnance or disgust Krishnabai at once fell to the task of cleaning the floor. She cleaned the floor actually with her hands while collecting the rubbish from which was issuing a most revolting stench. Within half-an-hour the place was swept and washed. The beauty of the whole thing was that all the while, when she was engaged in this work, she was patient, cheerful and smiling. Ramdas, on entering the room, found a brass spittoon which was daily used by him had alone been taken away, and a few drops of the nightsoil had disfigured the manuscript of this narrative. The night passed without anything further happening.

Again after a week or thereabouts, at almost the same hour of the night, two men came to the ashram of whom one was the previous visitor. It was a dark night. The ashram was so situated in a dense jungle that within two furlongs around it there was no other habitation. This time the visitors appeared to have come with a sterner mission. For the first few minutes they demanded of Ramdas many articles that were in the ashram including a framed board containing the name 'Anandashram' artistically formed in glass beads. He handed over these things to the visitors without any hesitation, and asked them if they wanted anything more. When this business was going on, he was standing just at the entrance of the room on the verandah and Krishnabai was beside him. The lamp was on the raised pedestal on which he usually sat, to the right side of the entrance. As soon as the visitors

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thought that the time for carrying out their intention had arrived, one of them took the lantern and with a sweep sent it flying into the court-yard, by which act the lantern broke and was suddenly extinguished. Now they found themselves in utter darkness. The man, who threw away the lantern, rushing up towards Krishnabai fell upon her. Beside her was a copper pot filled with water. Ramdas was at the time a little away from the front door. Realizing the situation he closed his arms upon the body of the man who was attacking Krishnabai with the object of preventing him from doing harm to her, but the other man who was watching the situation pulled Ramdas from behind with all his strength, making him give up the hold on the other man, and held him tight within his arms. Ramdas' whole body thrilled and he in a loud voice uttered the Name "Ram" three times. Simultaneously as it were, the Name "Ram" issued twice from Krishnabai's lips. At the sound of this Name, the man who had well-nigh clutched Krishnabai's throat to strangle her, let go his hands and started like a scared creature to run away from the place. Beholding him taking to his heels, the other man, who was holding Ramdas in a tight embrace, set him free and jumping down the verandah followed suit. When leaving Krishnabai the man who attacked her pushed her down causing the small of her back to strike with great force upon the hard rim of the copper vessel, and the next instant she rolled down the verandah to the surrounding yard of the ashram. In the dark, by taking her name aloud Ramdas located the place where she fell. He ran up to her and they stood together, Ramdas exclaiming: "Oh! Ram, what is this you are doing?" Then Krishnabai said: "Nothing is the matter. Don't accuse Ram; everything is all right."

Beyond the fields, on the right side of the ashram, there was the house of a cultivator who must have been observing

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from his front-yard the strange happenings at the ashram. When he heard the sound "Ram" "Ram" in a loud key from Ramdas and saw the sudden darkness that enveloped the ashram, he suspected some mischief and came running. It took him about five minutes to pass through the fields in the dark and reach the ashram. But the grim visitors of the night had fled away. With the help of a match they lit a torch made of palm leaves. On his enquiry Ramdas related to him all that had happened. He said: "I shall sleep here tonight and see how those blackguards will dare to molest you again."

For the night it was all right. What about the future nights? Turning to Krishnabai Ramdas appealed to her not to remain in the ashram in the nights from next day onwards. He would prefer to be alone in it. But she would not agree. "Whatever happens to me I will not stay away for the nights." Seeing that she was determined and persuasion was futile, Ramdas at once made up his mind to leave the ashram for good and get out of the place. Instantly he started with Krishnabai for the town, and the cultivator friend, who was also joined by another, accompanied them as far as Chandrashekarrao's house, situated in the heart of the town. When Ramdas was walking fast towards the town closely followed by Krishnabai, she appealed to him in a piteous tone: "Papa, what are your future plans?" He replied that he did not know.

"It is Ram's command to leave Kasaragod at the earliest opportunity. He will go wherever Ram leads him."

To this she said: "Please do not abandon me. I have no place and no refuge except you. Permit me to follow you wherever you go."

"No, no. Do not think of doing so," Ramdas replied.

In a rising emotion she waylaid him, appealed again and insisted upon his giving the word. He yielded and agreed.

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They reached Chandrashekarrao's house. Thus ended the memorable events of this night.

As was natural, the household were shocked to hear of the dreadful situation through which Ramdas and Krishnabai had passed at the ashram. The fall on the water pot had caused permanent injury to the lower end of Krishnabai's spinal cord. In spite of the excruciating pain, she was patient and cheerful as if nothing had happened to her. His resolution was made that he should leave Kasaragod the very next day. The night passed. By the earliest train on the following day he and Krishnabai with Chandrashekarrao came to Hosdrug. In Hosdrug there were some mothers who were keenly anxious to have him at their house for some days. To fulfil their long cherished desire, on alighting at the Kanhangad station he directed his steps straight to their house. The party was received by the kind mothers with great joy. His future plans were unsettled.

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CHAPTER XLVIII

RAMNAGAR—ANANDASHRAM

After a few days' stay, Ramdas and Krishnabai, at the invitation of T. Bhavanishankerrao, came to Manjapati, now known as Ramnagar, for the opening ceremony of his newly built house at this place. T. Bhavanishankerrao and other friends pressed Ramdas to have an ashram built near the Manjapati hill, which place was discovered to be not only solitary but also possessing all the scenic grandeur of the country-side.

The selection of the spot for the construction of Anandashram has indeed a deep significance. Without knowing the antecedents of the place, Ramdas was prompted to choose it intuitively. He later discovered that the place, which is known as Manjapati, was at one time covered with a thick forest and that sadhus and sannyasis were doing tapasya in it. It was also said that the hill is sacred because in olden days there was on it a temple and a tank, faint traces of which are still to be seen. Tradition has it too, that Hanuman, when he was returning to Lanka, carrying the hill of Dronachala, dropped a portion of it, at this spot, and that that portion forms the present hill. In this connection Ramdas can say definitely that God must have had strong reasons for directing his servant Ramdas to this place. Both Hanuman and he were the votaries of the same Name, Ram, and both were born on the same day in the Hindu calendar year. This cannot be a matter of mere coincidence: it must be part of a plan, divinely ordained. That probably accounts also for the visions that some devotees occasionally get of Sri Hanuman visiting the Bhajan Mandir of the Ashram. One such was vouchsafed in the early years of

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the Ashram to Srimati Devibai alias Appibai. She related to us one day a wonderful vision she had had when she slept in the Ashram Bhajan Mandir. She saw a huge figure of a monkey entering the Bhajan Hall, walking up to the asan, prostrating before it, and then leaving by the back door. The vision had made such a deep impression on her mind, that when she was relating it, she felt highly elated, for she thought, it was Hanuman himself who had given her his darshan.

Agreeing to the suggestion of the friends he decided to have an ashram erected on a small hillock by the side of a towering hill—the highest in the range. At once God, who gave the idea, set him to work for accomplishing it. He wrote appeals for funds to the innumerable friends all over India, with whom he had come in contact during his itinerant life, for making up the cost of the new ashram. The encouragement and help he received on all sides was simply marvellous. Within a month of his arrival at Ramnagar the work of erecting the ashram building was started. The friends who offered the suggestion heartily joined in it. The ashram was begun only three months before the breaking of the monsoon; so the work had to be hurried on. In three months the main ashram building and an outhouse behind it were completed.

The Scenery

While to the right side of the ashram there is a chain of undulating hills, in front there lie extensive grounds formed by groves of trees and corn-fields. To the left the vision can sweep over about four miles a vast plateau covered with thick vegetation, plains and scattered houses, having at the far end the Arabian sea with its blue expanse of water. Behind the ashram are rows of hills covered over with verdant growth, having on both sides beautiful cocoanut topes, whose crests wave majestically in the strong breeze that blow over them

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from the sea. To stand out on the ashram hill and cast a look around means to present to the sight a most fascinating picture of nature dressed in her variegated colours. When the sun is midway in the heavens and its rays are reflected on the waters of the sea, it looks as though a vast sheet of silver is shining at a distance. After a few monsoon rains, when the green grass like a mantle spreads over the hills and plains, the surroundings offer a bewitching sight to the onlooker. The atmosphere prevailing at the ashram and over the surrounding land is surcharged with perfect calmness and peace.

The Opening Celebration

The opening ceremony of the new ashram which is also named 'Anandashram,' came on the 15th May 1931. In response to the invitations, hundreds of people from different parts of India assembled for the occasion. Bhajan, kirtan, feast and distribution of food, etc., to the poor went on for ten days. The hills of Ramnagar resounded with the thrilling music of the Lord's glorious Names. From Maharashtra about half-a-dozen devotees attended the function. Janardan Pant, Raghunath Maharaj, Govind Ramkrishna Joshi, Krishnaji Pandharinath and Madhavrao Kulkarni were amongst them. These devotees took whole-hearted part in the bhajans and kirtans.

At the opening ceremony, as requested by the assembled devotees and friends, Ramdas delivered a short speech. Briefly put, it ran as follows:—

"Ramdas has the supreme delight to speak to you to-day a few words at the inauguration of this holy ashram. The ideal which the ashram holds before it is universal love and service, based upon a vision of divinity in all beings and creatures of the world. Here every man, woman or child, to whatever denomination, creed, or caste the person may belong, shall have

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free access. This is a place where every effort will be made to cultivate the spirit of mutual love and service, so that what is realized within its walls may prove as an example for the right conduct of human life in the outside world. The Lord is our help and guide in all matters. May He with all His bounty shower His blessings on the great service which this home of love and bliss has undertaken to discharge!"

Krishnabai, although greatly weakened by the injury she had sustained at the Kasaragod ashram, brought all her rare skill and indefatigable energy to bear upon the management of the function. Every programme was gone through with exactness and regularity. It must be admitted that Krishnabai is a born organizer, and exhibited in all things her wonderful capacity for handling difficult situations, for soon after the opening of the buildings, torrential rains accompanied by thunder, lightning and storms swept over the ashram building. But the radiant and ever calm figure of Krishnabai was moving about in the assemblage like an angel ministering to the minutest wants of all. None of the visitors went without her special care and service. In short she had her maternal eye upon all alike.

At the time of the opening of the ashram, we had the most illuminating sayings of the great religious Teachers of the world, neatly written out in block letters, on thick sheet of paper, in English, Sanskrit and Marathi; and these were framed and hung up on the walls of the Bhajan Hall. Also the Ram mantra was painted on the walls in different languages. The sayings were:—

1. To those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, to those ever harmonious, I bring full security.

(IX, 22—The Gita)

2. God is love; he who dwells in love dwells in God and God in him.

(Jesus Christ)

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3. God resides in that heart in which there is compassion, forgiveness and peace. (Sant Tukaram)

4. He who wears his body in God's service, who has Ram Nam always on his tongue, who walks always on the path of righteousness, such a servant of the Lord is blest on this earth. (Samarth Ramdas)

5. Dedication of wife, son, house and life to God is the perfect path of devotion. This is truly called worship.
(Eknath Maharaj)

6. Abandoning all duties, come to Me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins.
(XVIII, 66—The Gita)

After the lapse of a few years, many of these were replaced by the pictures of these Teachers, which are still adorning the walls of the ashram. They are those of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Saradamani Devi, Sai Baba, Jesus Christ, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Buddha, Zoroaster, Swami Vivekanand, Guru Nanak Dev and Gurudev.

Ramdas had realized the unity of all religions, and his love and admiration go out to all the spiritual teachers equally. He is at once the servant of the Almighty, and a child of saints. How blissful it is to feel and be conscious of this truth!

Mother Rukmabai

A few days after Ramdas left Kasaragod, mother Rukmabai who was still staying at her daughter's house, came to Ramnagar and after a short stay proceeded to Madras to spend a few days with her nephew. She had a great mind to live permanently with Ramdas in the new ashram. But God willed otherwise. Soon after her arrival in Madras her asthmatic complaint took a serious turn. Her condition became critical.

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At this time her nephew questioned her as to whom she wanted to see and she at once replied: "I want to see Krishnabai." She also added: "If I should at all recover, it is possible only under her tender and careful nursing. For, during my last illness at Kasaragod, when I was at the very doors of death, she alone could save me from its jaws." But it was not possible for Krishnabai to go to her. A few days later came the news that she passed away. May her soul ever rest in peace!

A word about her in this connection will not be out of place. She was a true, noble and faithful partner in his old life. It was but natural that when God took Ramdas away from her company and made him dedicate his life entirely to His service, she felt no small amount of pain, but latterly when she came to stay with him in the Kasaragod ashram she thoroughly understood the intention of God in bringing about the transformation in his life. Naturally of a religious temperament, thereafter her devotion became so intense that she burnt with the aspiration to attain the vision of God. The Lord's great Name continuously dwelt on her lips and even to the last moment she maintained the remembrance of God and dropped off the body in that exalted consciousness.

Gurudev

More than five months after the opening celebration of the ashram, Ramdas received the tidings that Gurudev, who was living with his son in Kasaragod, renounced his body, on the 8th November 1931, at 5-30 p.m. On the 13th day, i.e., on the 20th November, his first *punya tithi* was observed in the ashram, during which we held bhajan throughout the day and night, and the next morning we fed four hundred poor people in his blessed memory. Many devotees from Mangalore and Kasaragod attended this function. In the last period of his

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life, for some months, he had reached a stage in which he remained perfectly unattached to the world, retaining all the time not only his consciousness of the external life, but also his jovial and cheerful nature. It was the wave of grace, compassion and love that rose from his magnanimous heart that turned Ramdas' life towards its fountain-head—God—ultimately granting him the highest vision of immortality, bliss and peace through perfect union and oneness with the immanent and transcendent Godhead.

Commemoration of Gandhiji's Fast

Mahatma Gandhiji's fast of twenty-one days ended on the 7th May 1933. In commemoration of this event, a *bodhi* tree was planted in front of the ashram.

"The Vision"

In October 1933, the first number of the English monthly magazine, "The Vision," was issued from the ashram. The object was to present to the spiritually inclined people in India and abroad, the lives and teachings of saints of all religions, to publish their pictures whenever possible and to lay before them Ramdas' own spiritual experiences. Ramdas was its first editor. The Marathi and the Malayalam monthlies ceased publication after running for a few years.

The Fakir Becomes an Amir

After some years, at the suggestion of friends, due to rheumatism and the weakened state of his body brought on by long and repeated tours, Ramdas had to use a chair for sitting, and a cot for sleeping. Krishnabai also got for him a raised, artistically-made, wooden dais, on which he sat during Bhajan time. He was made to wear stockings, a woollen coat, and a muffler round his neck, and looked a *bara sahib*. When he sat

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leaning on the cushioned chair, the *fakir* looked like an *amir*. How wonderful is the lila of the Lord! Ramdas dances to His tune and is happy.

A Scotch friend, who contributed articles to "The Vision," and was carrying on correspondence with Ramdas, once wrote to him, taking objection to the title of "His Holiness," which some writers in "The Vision" had used before his name. He strongly urged that Ramdas should not accept this title. Ramdas wrote in reply that it was immaterial to him whether people gave him honour or its opposite. If he took notice of the one, he had to take notice of the other also. But his actual position, by the grace of the Supreme, is that he is beyond both. So Ramdas is prepared cheerfully to accept praise or blame, whichever it pleases people to give him.

Patrons and Donors

It must be understood, God alone, who is the one benevolent ruler of the worlds, made possible the establishment of this ashram. The activities of the ashram are day by day extending owing to the generous donations it is receiving from innumerable, selfless, pure and noble souls from different parts of India and abroad. All credit for any work or service rendered by it is due to them. Many of these are friends, whose self-effacement is so complete that they have enjoined on him not to reveal their names in connection with the lavish help in money and other ways offered by them for the furtherance of the ashram mission. So without mentioning their names Ramdas acknowledges their loving co-operation with infinite gratitude.

Relief to the Poor

Periodically, and also particularly during celebrations, distribution of foodstuffs to the poor is one of the important items

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of ashram service. On such occasions relief is rendered to thousands of people. The ashram is open to all people irrespective of caste, creed, colour or nationality. Willing and cheerful service on equal basis is offered to all of them.

Ashram Buildings

The main ashram consists of a bhajan mandir in front enclosed by arched walls, the upper part of which is ornamented with cornice work which gives the hall not only an artistic view but also a distinctly imposing and charming appearance. At the back of the bhajan mandir is a small room for Ramdas' occupation. The out-house which is situated directly at the back of the main building is made up of four rooms, two on each side, having a pathway between, one side of which was used as a kitchen and the other for the residence of casual guests.

Later, another small building was erected in the ashram compound for purposes of conducting the editorial and official business of the two magazines and correspondence. The cost of this building was met by the generosity of the Thakore Saheb of Limbdi, Sir Daulatsinh, to whom Ramdas expresses his feelings of gratitude.

It was with great sorrow that Ramdas heard of the passing away of Sri Daulatsinhji, whom Ramdas has mentioned at several places in this book. Whenever Ramdas went to Limbdi, the Thakore Saheb would take him to his palace and treat him with all love and hospitality. He was a devotee of Sri Krishna and had also a great regard for saints. He was also charitable in his nature and had donated large sums to various philanthropic institutions. He had a noble and devout partner in life, who departed this life earlier than he.

During Ramdas' absence on tour in 1938, Krishnabai built two houses for poor Harijan families, and three for ashram

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workers. She herself supervised their construction. She also made new roads and other improvements in the ashram compound, besides getting the Bhajan Hall and other buildings painted.

As the old cow-house was inadequate for the increasing number of cows, a bigger one has been constructed. For want of funds we could build only a thatched house. But the building is very spacious. This was also planned by Krishnabai and the work was carried on under her direct supervision.

From the very beginning of the ashram, sadhus started coming daily to the ashram. In course of time their number increased to such an extent that it became a problem to find accommodation for them. So we constructed a separate building for their use, which goes by the name Sadhu Dharmashala. During the first year of his itinerant life, after renouncing the world, Ramdas was travelling in the company of the sadhus and sannyasis, as related in his earlier books. It was really they who looked after him with great care and affection. It was in their company that Ramdas had gone through rigorous austerities, in which they also had participated, whether they liked it or not—being strongly attached to him. Accordingly, when these wandering mendicants come to the ashram they are given their food and lodging. As soon as Ramdas sees them, he is reminded of those memorable days of wild freedom and joy, spent in their company.

In the pious memory of Heble Annappayya, a great devotee, who spent his last days in the ashram, his sons, principally Ganesh Heblekar, who is deeply attached to the ashram, have raised a samadhi on the *asthi* of Annappayya. It can be seen in the ashram compound, facing the Dharmashala for sadhus. There is a marble tablet on it, with the inscription of his name, and the dates of his birth and death.

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Gatherings

Principal N. B. Butani proposed that a gathering be held in the ashram during the Christmas holidays of 1938. He sent invitation to ashram friends living in different parts of India. Preparations were made on a large scale for this gathering. Special pandals were erected and these were beautifully decorated. As the days of celebration approached, devotees and friends started pouring in, and on the principal days of the celebration, there was a large number of people. The ashram was humming with activity. The ashram had had no such gathering till then. One ought to have seen Krishnabai in those days—how her radiant personality was moving about, like a flash of light, inspiring all workers to carry on the duties entrusted to them with energy and enthusiasm. There was no scarcity of anything. The important item of the programme was feeding. Thousands after thousands were fed from morning till late in the night. It was all a most blissful experience, never to be forgotten. Ramdas was witnessing the whole lila with no small joy, and he found people belonging to various castes, creeds and places mingling with one another as friends and brothers, on the basis of spiritual kinship. Truly, real happiness can be attained by humanity only when it is aware of the indwelling spirit that unites all members of the human race into one world union or family. Here, in the total absence of the ego-self, manifests a cosmic consciousness, in which all distinctions are lost, and every one experiences the bliss eternal. Although Ramdas' health at this time was weak, he could take part in all the functions without feeling the least strain, as he was, all throughout, conscious only of joy and nothing else. It was surely a memorable event in the life of the ashram.

The December gathering of 1940 was also noteworthy in many respects. Principally it was so, because of the large

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number of devotees who had gathered together, without any expectation that it was going to be a gathering at all; each came, without knowing that any others were coming.

Electric Lighting

There is a saying of a saint, often quoted in Maharashtra, "God is the fulfiller of a *satya sankalpa* (pure wish) of His devotee. The devotee makes a plan and God works it out." In the nights, specially the dark ones, it was found difficult for the ashramites and the visitors to move about in the ashram grounds. Moreover, snakes of all kinds crawled about within the compound. Ramdas felt that it would be well if we had an electric installation, so that the buildings and the various roads and paths were well-lighted. This wish he expressed in the presence of some friends. God did not take long to see that an electric installation was set up in the ashram. During nights the ashram now looks from a distance like a fairy-land with its powerful dome-light visible for miles around. Ramdas remembers in this connection the Biblical words: 'God said: Let there be light! And there was light!' So it was here.

A gerrua flag is also attached to the tall post on which the dome-light is put up. It is the emblem of the ashram signifying renunciation, love and service.

*Sri Krishna Vidyalaya

God fulfilled Ramdas' wish to start an elementary school in Ramnagar, for imparting education to children living in it and in the surrounding villages. The foundation for the building was laid by Krishnabai in the year 1940 on her birthday,

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* The Vidyalaya is run by the Harijan Welfare Department of the Government of Kerala, from 1955.

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with the singing of Ramnam, a large number of devotees attending the function. At the time when this function took place, we clearly felt that God blessed this enterprise, as there was a thrill in the air, of blissful anticipation, as all joined with implicit faith and perfect confidence.

B. Krishnaswamy Iyengar, retired Principal of the Engineering College, Bangalore, and V. V. Patankar, retired Executive Engineer, Mysore Government, Bangalore, prepared the necessary plans for the building.

A cement image of Goddess Saraswati, in a standing posture, with a veena in Her hands, beautifully painted, is installed in a niche in the front wall of the Vidyalaya building. Goddess Saraswati is the symbol of *Vidya* (learning). She presides over our educational institution, and surely Her grace is abundantly pouring on it. The school is named Sri Krishna Vidyalaya. The opening ceremony took place in the year 1942 on Ramdas' birthday. It was the inauguration of the beginning of a new life for the poor, destitute and neglected children, often seen roaming aimlessly about the ashram. Ramdas' long-cherished desire was now fulfilled. God's grace is really bounteous.

Besides teaching the three R's to the pupils, we introduced handicrafts such as hand-spinning, basket-weaving, clay-modelling and coir work. The children are trained also in gardening and vegetable growing. They have the usual outdoor games and the indoor play of *kollattam* and *lazim*. We admit into the Vidyalaya children of all classes and castes, including Harijans and Muslims.

In the Boarding Home, the children are given bath and a washed set of clothes every morning, before breakfast, which they take after a prayer. Then, again, when the classes begin, all the pupils assemble in the central hall of the school and

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hold prayers. Visitors have observed that the children look clean, smart and intelligent, and that the children of the higher castes cannot be distinguished from those of the Harijans, in regard either to cleanliness or the expression of the face. The light of God dwells alike in all beings, to whatever category they belong. Only conditions have to be provided for this light to shine out. The man-made divisions, on the score of birth, race and other considerations, are wholly unnatural and meaningless.

The central room of the Vidyalaya is used as a prayer hall by the school children and teachers, at the beginning and at the end of the school work. In this room, we have, on the walls, pictures of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramana Maharshi, presented by the devotees of the ashram. In one of the bigger halls of the school, the children hold bhajans every Thursday, before the school closes for the day. Friends have presented to the institution benches, maps, pictures, slates, library books, equipments for games, and other articles of school use. The school observes, annually, its Opening Day and also other days of religious and national importance.

*Sri Krishna Udyogshala

In addition to the educational work undertaken by the ashram, it was proposed to start an industrial school so that the children, after finishing the elementary course, may be trained in some handicrafts. To start with, for this purpose, we used the house on the property presented to the ashram by Dr. S. R. U. Savoor. We had also built a thatched shed in front of it for locating handlooms. In the verandah of the house, we held training classes in leather and horn work. We

* The Udyogshala was handed over as free gift to The Nileshwar Handloom Weavers' Co-operative Society in 1956.

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were feeling that the space in this temporary arrangement was not sufficient. Naturally the idea of constructing a new, pukka building came into being and an appeal was made for funds. Shankar Mallapur, who had taken a leading part in the collection of the Shashtiabda Poorti Fund, requested his boss Sri Bhogilal Patel to bear the entire cost of the building which came to Rs. 28,453-7-3 which he graciously did in the name of his wife Srimati Ichhabai Bhogilal H. Patel as her contribution to the above Fund. He has stipulated that the building should never be used except for industrial purposes. The plan of the building was prepared by Sri D. G. Karanjgaokar, a well-known architect of Bombay, who then, happily, had come on a visit to the ashram. It is a beautiful, spacious and well-ventilated structure in the school compound. It is named Sri Krishna Udyogshala. Its opening ceremony was performed on the 44th birthday of Krishnabai on 25th September 1946. Friends contributed towards its equipment and maintenance. The four old looms destroyed by fire in the temporary thatched shed were substituted by ten new ones bought from the donation of Ramprasad M. Dave of Ahmedabad. There is a showroom in the building, in which the manufactured articles are kept for sale. In course of time, we had to abolish the leather and horn sections. Instead we have started hand-spinning, tailoring and hand-weaving.

The Shashtiabda Poorti Fund

Here a few words must be said about the Shashtiabda Poorti Fund, a reference to which has been made above. The idea of collecting a fund for a purse to be presented to Ramdas on the completion of his 60th year first originated with U. Sanjiv Rao of Bombay and afterwards took the shape of a resolution moved by R. N. Haldipur and adopted at a special meeting of the Bombay branch of the Anandashram held on 26th

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December 1943 with S. R. Hattiangadi in the chair. When the proposal was conveyed to Ramdas for acceptance he only thought that God was arranging for the clearance of debts incurred by the ashram in His service, the outstandings at the time having accumulated to the tune of about Rs. 48,000/-. He accordingly agreed readily to what he felt to be a divinely inspired move, started by the Lord Himself in furtherance of His own cause. The Fund was closed early in 1947 when it reached a total of Rs. 1,04,775-14-0, exceeding the target of one lakh fixed. A statement regarding the disbursements made out of the collections was published in October 1946 in "The Vision." The nature of the financial crisis that was thus tided over will be realised from the fact that about Rs. 55,500/- had to be paid to clear off the debts and deficits incurred by the ashram during its 16 years' life of ever-expanding service. It is also noteworthy that whatever moneys were received from time to time were spent away then and there, under the heads stated, so that no balance was left out of the Fund when it was closed.

The Dispensary

In the early days of the ashram we had been giving only Homoeopathic treatment to the ailing persons who resorted to us for medical relief. We had opened also a section for the dressing of wounds and for the rendering of first aid to the injured. Both these activities were conducted in a part of "The Vision" office building. As the number of patients increased, we felt the need of having a separate building for the dispensary, outside the ashram compound. It was proposed also to open an Allopathic section in the dispensary and an appeal was made for funds through "The Vision." As the amount collected for constructing a dispensary building was inadequate, it was decided to use the "Pushpa House", which was built by

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Principal N. B. Butani in memory of his youngest daughter Pushpa, for the purpose of the dispensary. The necessary permission for such use was most heartily given by Butani and his wife when they were approached for the same. We shifted to this place all the dispensary equipment from the room in "The Vision" office; and from that time onwards we have been carrying on here the medical relief on a wider scale.

Visitors

The ashram has the happy privilege of being blessed occasionally by the visits of noted saints and devotees of God. By their presence in it they infuse into the inmates enthusiasm in the discharge of their humble duties. The following is a brief account of a few of such saintly visitors:—

Swami Nityanand, a great yogi, was residing in Hosdrug. He made several improvements in the old, neglected Hosdrug fort. He was attracting people from all parts of the South Kanara District, and even from far off places. His darshan was rightly considered by devotees to be of immense spiritual benefit. Ramdas had the opportunity of meeting him once, when he was dwelling in the Panch-Pandav caves. He had no cloth on his body except a *kaupin*. He was dark in complexion, but possessed a tall, fully-developed, well-proportioned body. One of his characteristic features was that his face was always suffused with most bewitching smiles. As he was seen always sunk in divine bliss, his devotees gave him the name Nityanand—meaning everlasting bliss. One day, towards the end of the second year of the ashram, one of the ashramites, Krishnappa, brought him to us. We gave him due honour and made him drink the cool water of a tender cocoanut. He did not speak a word. After remaining with us for about ten minutes, he went away.

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Mahant Sri Rampratapdasji Guru Hanumandasji, a saint of Ahmedabad came to the Ashram with a party of devotees. At one time he was a very orthodox sadhu, observing strictly the rules of caste distinctions. After coming to the ashram, he gradually shook them off, and mingled freely with the ashramites. Every year, for several years, he was having the *yatra*, as he called it, to South India, when he would pay visits to Sri Ramanashram and Anandashram. He used to find great joy in feeding and clothing the poor, for which he would spend lavishly.

Yogi Ramaiah, one of the prominent disciples of Sri Ramana Maharshi, came with two other friends. Ramdas felt very happy to see him. His eyes have a light which is perfectly other-worldly, and you feel that he is imbued with the spirit of dispassion. When he sat silent at any place Ramdas could clearly see that he was conscious of only one existence. This is the attitude of those whose mind is ever in tune with the Eternal. Their look shows that their heart is elsewhere. Ramdas remembers the instance of the hen that sits on its eggs for hatching. If you observe a hen thus occupied, you find a peculiar, vacant look in its eyes, as its internal gaze is fixed on the eggs. The eyes then appear blank, devoid of every kind of expression. Such are the eyes that see and see not. For they look into the Infinite and not at the relative world. Yogi Ramaiah knew only Telugu; Ramdas could, therefore, communicate with him only by signs. Ramaiah attempted to express himself, but his language was a jumble of Telugu and Tamil with a sprinkling of English words. We used to have a good laugh on this, in which he also used to join. Ramdas cannot forget the delicious mangoes he brought for him. They were as sweet as he himself.

Swami Siddheshwaranand turned up suddenly one day.

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He was President of the Ramkrishna Ashram, Bangalore. Ramdas was really delighted to see him. He was full of light, love and devotion. He spent with us only a few hours.

Swami Gurudevanand, whose original name was Sridhar Kamat, belonging to Goa, paid a visit to the ashram. After a few days' stay he took sannyas and assumed the new name. For some days he was engaged in meditation, in the cave on the Manjapati hill, where a serpent seems to have been freely moving about. He was an earnest sadhaka imbued with a spirit of renunciation.

Sadhu Sadanand, a German, who had joined the Gowdiya Math, came with his sannyasi *gurubhai*, Krishnakant. He had sannyasi clothes, a tuft on his head, and a *mala* round his neck signifying that he was a Vaishnava Bhakta. The *gurubhai* was an Assamese. Sadhu Sadanand had been, it appears, a Professor in a German University and was a man of great learning and attainments. But he was found to be very simple in his nature and ways. In fact, we loved him at first sight. His *gurubhai* was active and took part in the service of the ashram. Sadhu Sadanand was so charmed with the ashram and its surroundings that he wished to return again and settle down in a small cottage, which, he said, he would build for himself, near the ashram. At the time he came, there was a proposal to stop the publication of "The Vision." Hearing this, Sadhu Sadanand persuaded us to keep the magazine going.

Just after the completion of the fifty-seventh birthday festivities of Ramdas, Swami Hariharanand of Sri Ananthaswami Math came to the ashram, with a party of his devotees. By reason of his coming, the Birthday celebrations were extended by four days, during which period he performed three *Hari-kathas* in the pandal erected on the plinth of the proposed

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dining hall and kitchen. Swami Hariharanand is a saint full of devotion. He is also a gifted singer. He attracts a large number of people to his kirtan and keeps them absorbed in listening to the inspiring words that flow out of his mouth, dealing with *bhakti, jnana* and *vairagya*. The three *Hari-kathas* related to (1) Sakhubai, (2) Damaji Panth and (3) Shabari. Throughout the description of the lives of these three saints, he brought out clearly how the Lord's Name was their light and refuge, and how by its power alone they were able to attain God-vision. He laid stress upon sincerity, purity of heart and faith as the essential qualities required for the realisation of God. The Swami is well-read in religious literature and has studied the lives of the saints of all parts of India. He was, therefore, able to quote freely from the teachings and songs of Kabir, Eknath, Tukaram, Jnanadev, Ramdas (Samarth), Tulsidas, Purandhardas and others. We had a most blissful time throughout his stay with us.

Swami Advaitanand and Ratilal Lakhia visited the ashram. Ramdas had met Swami Advaitanand at Vishnubhai Thakore's place at Patna. Ramdas felt very happy to have him. After a stay of three days with us they left.

K. Krishna Bhagat is a well-known banker of Tellicherry. He came to the ashram with his wife, Sri Rama Devi. He is a devout soul. Ramdas here is concerned with his wife, who, at the time, had reached an advanced stage on the spiritual path. She was developing a childlike nature and her heart was constantly in tune with God. This was apparent in all her ways and doings, which were free and spontaneous. She has, thereafter, visited our ashram several times. Latterly we found that she was rapidly blossoming into a radiant being. The last time she came, she was evolved to such a state that she could spiritually awaken people who came into contact with her. She had

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many devotees and admirers. She used to sing bhajan and go into trances, and Ramdas also heard that she danced in ecstasy when her heart was filled with divine emotion. She teaches that love is the one thing that an aspirant should develop, in order to realise God. She emphasises the value of congregational bhajan as the way to keep our minds absorbed in the thought of God.

Sri Prem Bhikshu of Gujarat, whom Ramdas had met at Ahmedabad, came one day to the ashram unexpectedly. He is full of love and devotion. Ramdas remembers his fair face, with a full black beard on it. Whenever Ramdas sees him, he is reminded of our Sikh friends of the Punjab. His love for Ramdas is indeed great. His talks with Ramdas are sweet.

Swami Srivasanand, a sannyasi belonging to the Ramakrishna Mission of Bangalore, came to the ashram with some devotees of Mangalore. Ramdas had a delightful time with him. He was about seventy years old at the time. His face was bright with spiritual lustre. He was a learned Swami, well-versed in Sanskrit and had started a Vedanta College at Bangalore. He worked hard for the spiritual uplift of the younger generation. He passed away a few years ago.

Sri Dilip Kumar Roy, one of the prominent disciples of Sri Aurobindo, came to the ashram on a fine morning. We were very happy to have him with us for a few days. His child-like nature endeared him to us all. There is always light and cheer on his face. He is a gifted singer. His musical concerts are very popular all over India as they thrill the hearts of the hearers. He sang with great devotional fervour in the ashram hall during the evening bhajan. He is also a reputed poet and essayist. He occasionally contributes his inspiring poems to "The Vision."

Srimat Anandashram Swamiji of Sri Chitrapur Math,

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Shirali, is, as Ramdas has described him in the earlier parts of this book, a spiritually illumined personality. It was indeed a gala day for all ashramites when they welcomed him. Krishnabai had made special arrangements in Sri Narasimha Iyer's house to accommodate him there. The days that he spent with us were memorable, in that we were all merged in a sea of rare bliss. In the evenings, His Holiness graced the ashram bhajan mandir at the time of the bhajan. On the last day, at the close of the bhajan, he delivered an inspiring discourse on Dharma, which besides, being eloquent and impressive, was marked by sparkling wit and humour. His radiant figure frequently comes before our mental vision.

Śri Punit Maharaj, a saint of Ahmedabad, paid us a visit accompanied by eighty followers. He gave us the joy of listening to his bhajans and discourses in Gujarati. He has the power of holding the audience under his spell by his remarkable devotion. It is evident that by his contact hundreds of aspirants have immensely benefited. He has a large following in Bombay and Ahmedabad. He is most unassuming and simple in his nature. He is a votary of Ramnam. He makes his disciples sing the Name in chorus and it is a blissful treat to those who sit by his side on such occasions.

Sri Mangesh Ramachandra Taki Maharaj, alias Sri Dada, is a famous saint of Jogeshwari, near Bombay. He came to the ashram with a few disciples. He is the very embodiment of divine love. He is purely satwic in his temperament and his talks are the overflow of his heart which is saturated with devotion. He is familiar with the songs of the saints of Maharashtra and other provinces of India. His father was also a great saint. He resides in Sadbhakti Mandir in Jogeshwari. He stayed with us for five days and gave us all great joy. Really, the most important land-marks in the life of the

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ashram are the visits of Saints and Mahatmas.

Cultivation of Paddy*

From about four years, the ashram has taken up the cultivation of paddy crops in the lands extending to about 15 acres belonging to the ashram. In this work Krishnabai is deeply interested and so it is carried out under her direct supervision. The ashram has engaged the services of about 50 workers, men and women, living in the vicinity. All the activities of the ashram including the paddy cultivation are performed by these workers. As the whole system is being worked on a community basis, every worker enjoys the full benefit of his work, in the shape of both wages and share in the produce. The co-operative spirit and whole-hearted enthusiasm of the workers are mainly responsible for the yield of rich harvests every year. The ashram has also fruit gardens yielding mangoes, sapotas, jack fruits and cocoanuts besides vegetables.

Conclusion

The first edition of this book was published in 1935. Since then many changes have taken place in the ashram. Although an attempt has been made in this chapter to bring the main story of the activities of the ashram up to date, it must be admitted that it has not been possible to record here all the changes in detail. The original routine of ashram life has altered. Many of the old workers have given place to new ones, as is but natural in the life of a growing institution. Additional houses and buildings have been put up in the ashram lands, some of them by friends and devotees who have willingly placed them at the disposal of the ashram for the

* The paddy fields have since been distributed among the ashram workers as free gift.

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accommodation of the perennial stream of visitors and other uses. The ashram has also secured hundreds of new friends, while many devoted souls have departed, whose loss is almost irreparable.

Since the starting of Anandashram in 1931, till 1938, Ramdas went once on an all-India tour and twice to many places in South India and Saurashtra. He did not again move out of the Ashram till 1949, from which year he has been going for a few months every year to various places all over India, mainly to Bombay and Saurashtra. In 1954, he went on a world tour, a detailed description of which is given in the book WORLD IS GOD, written by him on his return to India.

A small temple has been constructed in the colony of Madigas (Harijans) about a mile from the Ashram. A beautiful bronze plaque of Sri Hanumanji, the great devotee of Sri Ramchandra, presented by Messrs. Wagh and Sons, Sculptors of Bombay, is installed in the temple. Ramdas performed the installation ceremony. The Madigas gather in the temple once in a week and do bhajan. The temple is kept neat and holy.

Sri Gunvantrai T. Kamdar, a merchant-prince of Saurashtra, has constructed an Ashram in Bhavnagar. In the course of his tours in Saurashtra, Ramdas laid the foundation stone for this Ashram building, and again in the following year, went there for its opening celebrations. The Ashram is named Ramdas Ashram. Since its inception, Ramdas had been spending a month or two in it every year, during winter. A large number of devotees attended bhajans in the Ashram and also came to listen to Ramdas' talks. In the other months of the year, renowned saints are invited to the Ashram and treated with great hospitality by the management. The saints give the unique joy of their holy company and the benefit of their spiritual discourses to the devotees of the place.

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The Silver Jubilee of Krishnabai's renunciation was celebrated in Anandashram on a very grand scale. A phenomenally large number of devotees came for the function from all parts of India and also a few from abroad. As arranged, the occasion was marked by the conclusion of the two-year Nam-Likhita Japa, in which devotees all over India took part, with a total of 33 crores while the target aimed at was only 25 crores.

By the indefatigable efforts of Mahant Śri Sudamdasji of Rokhadia Hanuman Temple, Porbandar, a new, beautiful and prominent Mandir of Hanuman is constructed in the same compound as the old temple. At the pressing invitation of the Mahant, Ramdas paid a visit to Porbandar for performing the *pratishta* (installation) of the images in the Mandir. The celebration took place with a great yagna performed by Sri G. T. Kamdar, who co-operated whole-heartedly in the functions and contributed towards the complete success of the great event.

Ramdas here concludes this long story of his experiences with the fervent prayer that the work of the ashram may gain, by the grace of God, greater strength, as years go by, enabling it to be a centre from which love and service may radiate to all parts of the world and thus fulfil the great purpose of God.

HARI OM TAT SAT

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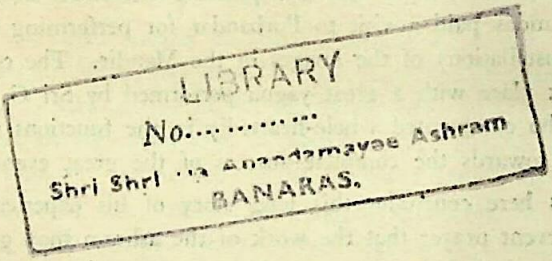

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GLOSSARY

Ahimsa	..	Non-violence
Anand	..	Divine bliss
Annakshetra	..	Free feeding house
Asanas	..	Yogic postures
Ashram	..	Abode of a saint
Ashtanga yoga	..	A spiritual practice governed by eight rules
Atmaghata	..	Self-destruction
Atman	..	The Spirit or Self
Avatar	..	Incarnation
Badmash	..	Rogue
Bhakta	..	Devotee
Bhakti	..	Devotion
Bhiksha	..	Alms
Bhutasthana	..	The shrine of a devil
Brahmacharya	..	A spiritual discipline involving strict continence
Buwa	..	A term of respect given to saints in Maharashtra
Cadjan pole	..	Cocoanut branch bereft of leaves
Chatak bird	..	An Indian bird which depends only on rain water for drink
Chawl	..	Block of buildings
Chenar	..	A huge tree peculiar to Kashmir
Chintapurni	..	Dispeller of woes
Chutnee	..	An East-Indian condiment

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Dandawat	..	Prostration
Darshan	..	Visit or vision
Dharmashala	..	Rest house
Dhun	..	Chorus
Diksha	..	Vow
Dwandwatita	..	The state of being free from pairs of opposites such as pleasure and pain, etc.
Guru	..	Spiritual preceptor
Harikatha	..	Religious discourse attended with music
Himsa	..	Violence
Jivanmukta	..	A liberated soul
Joli	..	Scrip
Kangdi	..	A fire pot used in Kashmir
Kaupin	..	Loin cloth
Khaddar — Khadi	..	Hand-spun and hand-woven cloth
Khichdi	..	Hotch-potch
Kirtan	..	Devotional music
Kisti	..	A small boat
Kula Devi	..	Family Goddess
Kuti	..	A small hut occupied by Sadhus
Lathi	..	Bamboo stick
Lila	..	Play
Mahatma	..	A great soul
Mandapam	..	Decorated structure
Mandir	..	Temple
Maya	..	Illusion
Mela	..	Assemblage
Moksha	..	Liberation

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Murti	..	Image
Namaskar	..	Salutation
Nishkama	..	Selfless
Pada Puja	..	Washing and worshipping the feet
Pandal	..	Temporary shelter made of mats
Pheran	..	A cloak
Pheta	..	Indian headwear
Prasadam	..	Food offered to God
Pravachan	..	Discourse on a religious text
Prem	..	Love
Puja	..	Worship
Pujari	..	Worshipper
Rajoguna	..	The quality of passionate nature
Rangoli	..	Artistic designs on the floor formed of a white powder
Rishi	..	Sage
Roti	..	Home-made bread
Sadhaka	..	A male spiritual aspirant
Sadhana	..	Spiritual practice
Sadhu	..	Saint
Sakama	..	Tinged with worldly desires
Samadhi	..	A saint's tomb or trance condition
Samsari	..	Worldly man
Satsang	..	Society of saints
Satwic	..	Mild or non-irritant
Shaivism	..	Shiva cult
Shanbhogue	..	Village accountant
Shiva and Shakti	..	God and His power
Shiva Linga	..	Image of Shiva

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Shraddha	..	Faith
Siddhanta	..	Doctrine
Tabla	..	A pair of Indian drums
Tapasya	..	Austerity
Trigunatita	..	The state beyond the three qualities
Upadesh	..	Initiation
Vairagya	..	Dispassion
Viswarupa Darshan	..	Universal vision
Yoga	..	Union with God

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THE AU[illegible]OR

After receiving [illegible]iation of the *Ram Mantra* from his father, Swami Ramdas, [illegible] was [illegible]nown as Vittal Rao, renounced the worldly life in 19[illegible] wandered as a mendicant Sadhu all over India and in the Himalayas, in a frenzy of God-intoxication, with the holy and all-powerful Ram Mantra ever on his tongue, and with God as his only refuge and guide. His was the completest surrender to the Will of God.

Many years of wandering life brought him finally back to South Kanara. Having attained spiritual liberation and God-vision, he started his mission to guide and serve mankind in order to awaken it to the awareness of God. He founded an Ashram named Anandashram near Kanhangad, N. Kerala, which is fostered by love and care by Mother Krishnabai, his foremost disciple and a Self-realized soul. Swami Ramdas' writings come from the deeps of Reality and therefore go straight to the heart. In 1954 he and Mother Krishnabai went on [illegible] tour and hundreds of his devotees, friends, and admirers who had loved and venerated them from a distance, had a chance to come into close contact with them. Since the last three decades Anandashram has been a [illegible] spiritual beacon, and thousands have [illegible] carrying home with them the [illegible] a Service at the feet of the Great Ma[illegible]

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